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MARCUS AURELIUS

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BY

JOHN PRESLAND

AUTHOR OF

"MANIN AND THE DEFENCE OF VENICE," "THE DELUGE,"

"MARY, QUEEN OF SCOTS," ETC.

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DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

THE EMPEROR MARCUS AURELIUS ANTONINUS.
THE EMPRESS FAUSTINA.
AVIDIUS CASSIUS, *in charge of Syrian provinces.*
STATIUS PRISCUS, MAXIMUS } *Roman generals.*
QUINTILIUS, RUFUS, HORATIUS, PETRONIUS, TITUS } *conspirators against the Emperor.*
GALEN, *a physician.*
JULIAN, *a lawyer, in close attendance on the Emperor, his confidant and adviser.*
VECTILIANUS, *secretary to the Emperor.*
HELIODORUS, MÆCIANUS } *sons of* CASSIUS.
DRUENTIANO, *his son-in-law.*
MANILIUS, *his secretary.*
A CENTURION.
1ST MESSENGER.
2ND MESSENGER.
PETRONILLA, *confidential slave to* FAUSTINA.

Slaves, Citizens *of Antioch,* Soldiers, *etc.*

9[illegible]

SYNOPSIS OF SCENERY.

ACT I.

SCENE 1.—*An open court (or garden) before the* EMPEROR'S *Palace at Rome.*

SCENE 2.—FAUSTINA'S *apartments in the Palace at Rome.*

ACT II.

SCENE 1.—CASSIUS' *Palace at Antioch.*

SCENE 2.—MARCUS AURELIUS' *tent in his camp at Illyricum.*

ACT III.

SCENE.—CASSIUS' *Palace at Antioch.*

ACT IV.

SCENE 1.—FAUSTINA'S *tent outside Antioch.*

SCENE 2.—MARCUS AURELIUS' *tent outside Antioch.*

NOTE.

The Romans did not use the word "lord" in addressing their Emperors until after the second century; "dominus" had a slavish significance which only a people who had forgotten civic freedom could use. As, however, our English word has none of this force, I have used it as the merest title of courtesy, and marked the slavish attitude by the word "master."

ACT I.

SCENE I.—*An open courtyard, or garden, in front of the* Emperor's *Palace at Rome.*

Enter STATIUS PRISCUS *and* QUINTILIUS, *meeting.*

QUIN. Good-morning, Priscus.

PRISCUS. And to you, good-morning.

QUIN. You are come early to the courts of great ones.

PRISCUS. Never begins a lucky day too soon.

QUIN. A lucky day?

PRISCUS. Why, in the calendar
A Roman triumph is a lucky day.

QUIN. Another's triumph?

PRISCUS. Let me envy him
His service, not his triumph.

QUIN. Envy him?
Ay do, the Emperor's favour.

PRISCUS. That as well.

QUIN. I had not thought you eager to kiss hands
With one who did deprive you of command,

For being too loyal to his interests,
Too harsh to those who loved you.

PRISCUS. Was it love
That made my legions hail me Emperor
When Antoninus died ?

QUIN. What else but love ?

PRISCUS. Caprice and discontentment. Those wild Britons
Do hunt the water-fowl in marshy wastes,
With little screens of reeds and water-lilies
Bound on their foreheads ; I had been a screen
To hunt that wildest bird, imperial power.

QUIN. Most honest Priscus ! There are many men
I've spoken with in Rome, who held you wronged
To be recalled from Britain ; in the East
Subordinated to this Cassius,
Who comes to-day to celebrate his luck.

PRISCUS. His luck and triumph are alike well earned ;
He has reduced the Eastern provinces
To such a state of quiet discipline,
As never, since the world began, was theirs.

QUIN. Other men, with his opportunities,
Had done as much. How long have *you* been kept
Wearing out shoe-leather in Rome ?

PRISCUS (*going towards the Palace*). Good-bye!
Your health and temper both are out of gear.

QUIN. It is injustice that so itches me;
For why must Priscus wait, like any client
About his patron's doors, while Cassius
Is being acclaimed through all the streets of Rome?

PRISCUS. Priscus, being asked to dinner, has arrived
A little ere the hour, to meet his friend
And sometime colleague, Cassius.

QUIN. Good-bye!
If you can be so stuffed with gratitude,
For the frugal meal that our philosopher
Offers his friends, I'll leave you.

PRISCUS. As you will.
That I am not a babbler you know well,
But there be many, hearing such things said,
Had made you mischief.

QUIN. You shall scold for this,
That I hate worth to go unrecognized.

PRISCUS. Here comes the Emperor.

QUIN. I'll stand aside.

Enter the EMPEROR MARCUS AURELIUS, *in imperial robes;* CASSIUS, *in soldier's dress, crowned with laurels; the* EMPRESS FAUSTINA, JULIAN, RUFUS, TITUS, DRUENTIANO, Senators, Soldiers, Slaves, *and others.*

MARCUS. Take off this robe of state; give me again
My Stoic gown. Come, let's go in to dinner,
Where you shall tell me, Cassius, at more length
Than letters can allow, what state of mind
You left among our peoples in the East.

JULIAN. They bless your rule, else worse than beasts they are.

MARCUS. And yet it is our nature to resist
Against what is, though good; or Cassius
Had lacked the opportunity to show
His valour, or to prove our gratitude.
Ah, Priscus! you have come to greet your comrade,
Who will be prouder to have earned your praise
—Being a soldier gallant as himself—
Than all the clamours of the populace.

CASSIUS. Greeting to Priscus.

PRISCUS. Lucky days to you.

MARCUS. To me, indeed, this is a lucky day,
When I may see my two great generals
On either hand; I have not been so glad
Since that auspicious hour my son was born.

Success has waited on our Roman arms:
Now let peace follow.

JULIAN. First must come the sword;
And then the plough; and then the scholar's gown——

MARCUS. And last the love of wisdom. Come, my friends!
Avidius, 'tis a tribute to yourself
That Fronto dines with us; he scarcely leaves
His house these days: gout holds him prisoner.
(*The crowd begins to disperse.*)

Enter a MESSENGER.

MESSENGER. I bring you letters, lord.

MARCUS (*to his secretary*). Pray take them for me.

MESSENGER. They are immediate.

MARCUS (*reading*). This is ill news.

RUFUS. May we not share it?

MARCUS. Rome must share the ill.
The Marcomanni and the Victuali,
And all those wandering tribes of the wild North,
That dwell upon the Danube's other shore,
Have risen in revolt; these letters say
That they are many hundred thousand strong
—Though that may be the natural cry of fear
Before the unexpected—yet they're bold;

For they have broken through our frontiers,
And on our Roman territory advanced
As far as Aquileia.

CASSIUS. Have they dared?

MARCUS. The Prefect of beleaguered Aquileia
Begs us for instant help; he fears the truth
Of this report some flying fugitives
Have spread among them, that the frontier legion
Is utterly destroyed, the enemy
Taking them by surprise.

CASSIUS. Ah, shame! ah, shame!

MARCUS. He doubts that Victorinus has been slain,
And that these hordes cannot be held at bay
Without a quick relief. That must he have!
Summon the Senate. Friends, go in to dinner,
And let me be excused. Vectilianus,
Despatch a word from me immediately
Promising help, but they must hold the town
Although the walls should crumble under them;
For Aquileia taken, all these wolves
Will fall upon our helpless provinces
And wreck them utterly. Go in, I pray you.

[*All the people begin to disperse and exeunt.*

MARCUS. Priscus, go, hold yourself in readiness;
We shall have work for you.

PRISCUS. For that, my thanks!
[*Exit* PRISCUS.

MARCUS (*to* MESSENGER). Acquaint me as we go along the way
Towards the Capitol with further news
You may have gathered, that these hasty letters
Have not set down. Come, Julian, with me.
[*Exeunt* MARCUS AURELIUS, MESSENGER, *and* JULIAN.

(CASSIUS *and* QUINTILIUS *left alone on the stage; as* CASSIUS *is going into the Palace, he is stopped by* QUINTILIUS.)

QUIN. Greeting to Cassius. Is he grown too great
In the imperial sunshine to clasp hands
With always his well-wisher and his friend?

CASSIUS. By all the gods! while I am Cassius
I'll not forget my friends.

QUIN. O Cassius!
Not Cassius enough these latter days,
When that great name that rocked the universe
Now stands in ante-chambers and in courts,
Among a slavish and dishonest crowd
That fawn upon their master. Cassius!
A name to conjure down the very stars
Among whose constellations stands *his* deed,
Who struck against the heart of tyranny,

And fell upon his sword at Philippi,
That death might spare his eyes the shameful sight
Of Romans fallen upon slavery.
O Cassius! let me repeat that name
As priests their conjurations, that the sound
Of holy syllables reiterated
May touch the hearts of men, and in the ears
Of the immortal gods find favour.

CASSIUS. Why,
You speak as you'd reproach me!

QUIN. No reproach.

CASSIUS. I have deserved none; I have borne in mind
From my youth up the honour of my name.
Even in my wild years I have not smirched it;
He lies who says so.

QUIN. Honour you have won
By many deeds of valour; may it guard you!

CASSIUS. What do you mean, Quintilius?

QUIN. Your good.

CASSIUS. Why should my honour guard me? from what ill

QUIN. Too little, and too much a Cassius!
How should that name of yours be singled out
For fortune by an Emperor? 'Tis a word
That spells ill-omenedly for tyranny.

CASSIUS. I think you fanciful.

QUIN. Think what you will;
But now the Emperor has employed your arms
In subjugating all the Parthians,
He will find reasons to be quit of you.

CASSIUS. Why should he so?

QUIN. You are too popular.

CASSIUS. I have not harmed him.

QUIN. In your name and fame,
Your personal valour, your successful deeds,
You wrong him every hour. Fare you well;
My tongue outruns my judgment.

CASSIUS. Stay awhile!
Is not the Emperor generous? If not generous,
Is he not just? Nay, if he be not just,
Is he not still constrained by policy
To reward good service?

QUIN. There are many means
To rid oneself of an officious servant
Who grows too prominent in the public eye.
The honorary Prefectship, perhaps,
Of some plague-ridden city; or, that fails,
An ill-conditioned and obscure revolt
Among the frontier soldiery. . . . Well, well!
Good luck to Cassius. (*Going.*)

CASSIUS. I think you wrong him;
He has been just and temperate more than most.

QUIN. O gods! how men misread the Emperor,
Thinking him simple—I am frank with you.
This justice and this aped philosophy,
This piety, this chastity, are lures
To draw men's simple souls into his net
And make a 'stablishment of tyranny.
What! can a man be honest, noble, great,
Who openly will bear such dirty marks
As the Empress draws across his name? No, no;
He is of all men the most cynical,
Most callous; shall this son of his not rule
After him, being entitled to his seat
By just so much as he's his mother's son?
A worthy Emperor to rule the world,
Who cannot rule his household! Let it be!
I see there is not one man left in Rome
Who cares for Roman honour.

CASSIUS. One there is.

QUIN. Ah, in old days there was a Cassius!
But now our great republic has become
A property of tyrants, tributary
To one man's greed; our institutions mocked,
Our constitution and our laws despised;

This form he makes among the Senators
Is simple pleasantry ; and when he says,
"Good conscript fathers," in his beard he smiles.

Enter RUFUS *and* TITUS *from the Palace.*

QUIN. Here come two honest men ; I'll go with them.
Good-bye, good Cassius.

CASSIUS. Have they usurped
The right to be called honest ?

RUFUS. Greeting, sir.

CASSIUS. I pray you let me call myself to mind ;
We went to school together.

RUFUS. Ay, too well
That's in my memory.

CASSIUS. Too well ?

RUFUS. Too well ;
For Cassius has not attained the deeds
Avidius promised.

CASSIUS. What should Cassius do ?

QUIN. Be but yourself.

CASSIUS. O gods ! what should I be,
Being myself ? Myself is twenty things
Which sometimes does desire what I must hate,
And hates what I desire. Be myself !

Now bridegroom-eager on a certain track,
And ere the moon change, colder than the moon
Towards my object. Yet give me an aim,
Inalterably fixed above my changes,
A steady star among the flying clouds,
I'll undertake to seize it.

QUIN. Dare we speak
To show this star to you, the star of Rome,
Which of late years does suffer such eclipse
As does affront the gods, widow the earth ?
O Cassius, look about you, be not blind ;
These busy market-places, these great towns,
These marble temples, baths and circuses,
These streets and arches, and these porticoes,
This gilded armour, and these doles of corn,
Do witness not a real prosperity,
Seeing the spirit that impelled us once
To conquer Hannibal, is now content
To serve an Emperor's pride.

RUFUS. It is his will
That arbitrates the universal world ;
There are no free men, save as he allows,
Nor any service, save as servants give,
Upon compulsion, not as citizens.
We are like children, neither voice nor part
In what concerns us ; though the Emperor

Rule us for good, yet, men as we were born,
The good is evil to us, being not good
That we have chosen.

CASSIUS. When I was a lad
I pondered on these matters, being impelled
By the associations of my name.

RUFUS. Yours was a generous youth.

CASSIUS. Of idle dreams.
Since manhood I have been too occupied
With doing many deeds.

RUFUS. Must we regret
These feats of arms that blazon so your name?
They cast a shadow on your noblest deed.

CASSIUS. Which deed?

RUFUS. That dream you dreamed of freedom once.

CASSIUS. I would be glad the Empire should be freed,
Of one man's rule; yet I had been more glad
To have heard no talk of it till it were done.
Why do you come to me, Quintilius?
Rufus, let go my arm; I am a soldier.
I'll rule my army and my provinces,
Holding my power from the Emperor's hands,
Until the universal will of Rome
Does take it from him.

QUIN. You will wish a thing,
And yet not will it?

CASSIUS. I will stand aside.

QUIN. O gods! I envy the barbarians
Who, having had no great past history,
Know not the shame of losing it. Farewell!
To Cassius we pinned all our foolish hopes,
Cheering ourselves with, "Courage, countryman.
When Cassius returns from Syria
All shall be better. Who should be our leader
Save Cassius alone? His famous name,
His famous deeds, his strict integrity,
Are bright in all men's eyes; one deed remains
To crown with greater glory all his past,
Complete his virtues. Wait for Cassius."

CASSIUS. What would you have me do, then?

RUFUS. Lend your weight
To help our enterprise. In Italy
We hope our influence, and jealousy
Aroused by these extended rights bestowed
On many foreign peoples, will combine
Against Aurelius. You, Cassius,
Carry the East with you; the Emperor
Is but a name to them. The foreign legions
That you commanded against Parthia

Do hold your name and person in such love
They'd hail you Emperor, were the choice with them.
Do you, the signal being agreed upon,
Declare the Roman rule republican,
And they'll accept it. . . . Nay, I think the world
Tires of tyranny; for there are many,
And those the best reputed men in Rome,
Who wait but for your name to head the list
To add their superscription.

QUIN. You will join?

CASSIUS. What crime is this that you will urge me to?

QUIN. No crime. Or, if it be a crime, what crime
Did the first Brutus sheathe in Tarquin's side?
What holy crime did the first Cassius
And second Brutus work on Cæsar's body?
There are some crimes more bright in history
Than any virtue.

CASSIUS. I would talk again
Upon these matters.

RUFUS. Come to my house, then.
To-night at supper will be gathered some
I would make known to you; your son-in-law
Threw in his lot with ours; we shall persuade you
To be no worse than he.

CASSIUS. I take him back
When I return to Antioch again,
Which will be shortly.

RUFUS. Nay, if we decide
The manner and the date of these our plans,
There's some of us will bear you company.

Enter PETRONILLA *from the Palace.*

PETR. Where is Lord Cassius?

QUIN. This one is he.
Come, Rufus! You will come to supper, then?

CASSIUS. Yes, I will come to-night.

QUIN. Good-bye.

RUFUS. Good-bye.
[*Exeunt* RUFUS *and* QUINTILIUS.

(CASSIUS *remains in thought, not noticing* PETRONILLA.)

PETR. My lord!

CASSIUS. You want me?

PETR. Sir, are you in haste?
The Empress sends me to you with commands
That, dinner finished, you will wait upon her.

CASSIUS. Excuse me to your mistress.

PETR. In what way?

CASSIUS. As best as you can.

PETR. She is not wont to have
Discourteous refusals.

CASSIUS. Nor am I
To wait upon the whims of anyone,
Even an Empress.

PETR. It is idle of me
To utter threats?

CASSIUS. Most idle.

PETR. Yet, remember,
The Emperor's wife is a bad enemy.

CASSIUS. A worse friend, yet, as Emperor's wife, the worst.

Enter FAUSTINA.

PETR. You will not come?

CASSIUS. No.

FAUSTINA. Come here, Cassius;
Reach me your hand. Will you not wear this ring
As token of my honourable regard?

CASSIUS. I cannot, lady.

FAUSTINA. Give me here your hand;
I'll put it on your finger. Oh, what hands!

How browned they are! That is your Syrian sun.
See, Petronilla, they are brown as wood,
And cruel and hard as iron that they wield.
(*Laying her own by his.*)
Nay, I protest; see but a woman's hand
Beside a man's, how small it is and weak!

CASSIUS (*withdrawing his hand*). Should women not remember that, and fear?

FAUSTINA. Those hands of yours were made to grasp at power,
While ours can scarcely hold the silly gauds
That give us pleasure. Well, your iron hand
Pleases us, though it crush us.

CASSIUS. Take your ring.

FAUSTINA. No, keep it, keep it; 'tis an evil deed
To throw a gift back. Petronilla, come.
Yet, if you would requite me, Cassius
(Though such a small gift asks for no requital)—
Yet, if you would requite my good intention,
Come visit me, when you may find an hour
Among your many cares, and tell me tales
Of all your deeds and conquests in the East.

CASSIUS. They are not worth recounting.

FAUSTINA. I be judge!

CASSIUS. I pray you will excuse me.

FAUSTINA. No, I will not;
Even the gods are sometimes contrary
To their poor votaries; on this occasion
I'll play the goddess.

CASSIUS. What should I relate?

FAUSTINA. The tale of all your glory, Cassius.
The fame of you has sounded through the world
Like silver trumpets. Nay, I will not tell you
What all men say, so there's a jealousy
For the Emperor, my husband; yet I know
Your greatest glory is in serving him.

CASSIUS. I have reported all my acts to him.

FAUSTINA. We know that you have nothing to conceal
From any eye, and least the Emperor's.
Might all men say so!

CASSIUS. And all women too!

FAUSTINA. How should he find a woman worth his thoughts?
I pray you, Cassius, when will you come?

CASSIUS. I will not come. And never willingly
Will I exchange another word with you
Till death has wrecked your beauty. Let me go!
Turn from me, turn from me those eyes of yours.

I will not come, I say—take back your ring.
O gods! that I had never seen your face!
[*He throws down the ring and exit hurriedly.*

PETR. He flung the ring here.

FAUSTINA. Give it back to me.
Cassius shall wear it yet; it shall become
The badge of servitude I make him bear.

PETR. Not Cassius!

FAUSTINA. Him, and no other one.

PETR. I never saw a man more arrogant
For virtue.

FAUSTINA. All the deeper be his fall.

Re-enter MARCUS AURELIUS, *alone.*

MARCUS. You are alone, Faustina?

FAUSTINA. But this moment
I talked with Cassius.

MARCUS (*going towards Palace*). Ah, was that so?

FAUSTINA. You do not ask of what?

MARCUS. No!

FAUSTINA. Wherefore not?

MARCUS. Either an idle curiosity,
Or some worse motive must have prompted it.
Idle I will not be, and gods forfend
That I should seek for evil.

FAUSTINA. Yet you wrong me
In this not asking.

MARCUS. Will you tell me, then?
And I will trust you, as I must in all.

FAUSTINA. And I deserve your trust; though evil tongues
Wag up and down the streets of Rome, unchecked
By your too-lenient laws.

MARCUS. It is themselves
That men harm, speaking evil.

FAUSTINA. Me they harm.

MARCUS. I hear no harm of you, Faustina. (*Going.*)

FAUSTINA. Nay,
I'll come with you. I begged this Cassius
To give me a recital of his deeds
Since he was in the East; he could not stay,
But he will come again.

MARCUS. When will he come?

FAUSTINA. Indeed, I think that he will come to-morrow.
[*Exeunt into Palace together.*

SCENE 2.—FAUSTINA'S *apartments in the* Emperor's *Palace at Rome.*

FAUSTINA *and* GALEN.

FAUSTINA. So bad, so bad his health is?

GALEN. Pray be calm.
You did command I should be frank with you,
And so I told you what none other knows,
Except the Emperor. His feeble health
Should hardly be constrained to lightest cares;
—And he supports the cares of this great world—
With utmost caution should it undergo
The least exertion; yet no slave but gives
More leisure to his body than your lord.
If you might work with him to take more ease,
It would be beneficial.

FAUSTINA. Tell me plainly
If he is like to die.

GALEN. This body of ours
Grows deathward from its earliest living hour;
And so the wise physician will not say
Of any man, he is not like to die.

FAUSTINA. Ah, but the Emperor, he is more like
To find death at this moment, say, than I?

GALEN. More likely, lady, but more certain, no;
He may support the burden of feebleness
For many years, and still be as he is
When you are ashes.

FAUSTINA. Cannot you be sure?

GALEN. No, lady; Nature has her secrets too.
But yet I should mislead you not to say
The Emperor's health is most precarious.
If he could be dissuaded from such acts
As undergoing the rigour of campaigns
In foreign climates, I were happier.

FAUSTINA. I'll do my best to further your designs,
Although not mine to meddle with the things
That he thinks needful.

Enter MARCUS AURELIUS.

MARCUS. Have you leisure now,
Or shall I talk with you this evening, lady?

FAUSTINA. I could not very well be occupied
Except about my lord. You come most aptly,
For I was asking Galen of your health.

GALEN. And I advised Augusta that she turned
Your thoughts to leisure, and more ease of body.

MARCUS. Why, fifty years I have been occupied
Turning my thoughts away from this poor corpse;
And now you'll make me careful of the thing?
Do you not recollect that's treasonable
Against my soul?

GALEN. If you commit a wrong
Against your body, in all Nature's work
There's no more deadly treason.

MARCUS. Then, good doctor,
We'll make a treaty: you be occupied
With care of my poor carcass, I be charged
With both our souls.

FAUSTINA. My lord, we do not jest.
You must take heed. Ah, surely one would think
You courted dying, as these Christians do!

MARCUS. The gods forfend! I hold as ill a thing
To hasten death as 'tis from death to blench
When in its hour it comes: I'll quell myself
Of wishing for it . . .

FAUSTINA. Nay, then! . . .

MARCUS. Be prepared;
We'll take you, Galen, into Germany.
For there, beside ourselves, we'll need your skill
Among our soldiers.

FAUSTINA. Must I guess your news?
Do you go Northward?

MARCUS. Yes, indeed I do;
As soon as I have settled my affairs,
And made my dispositions here in Rome.

FAUSTINA. Now, by the gods, this is ill news indeed.
—Pray leave us, Galen.—This is what I feared.

GALEN. My lord, I take my leave.

MARCUS. And bear in mind
That you come with us when we go.

GALEN. Yes, lord.
[*Exit* GALEN.

MARCUS. Look up, Faustina! What is this?

FAUSTINA. Alas!
Must you indeed adventure your poor health
Among these rebels of the blustering North,
Encountering, worse than fiercest enemy,
Blizzards and snows and famine? Must you go?

MARCUS. It is imperative. The news to-day
Is worse than yesterday's; our frontiers
Are threatened by such hordes of savages
That almost by their numbers they might pour
Resistless on our Empire, show themselves
Before the gates of Rome.

FAUSTINA. Impossible!
They are barbarians, ill-armed, ill-led.

MARCUS. A flight of locusts will destroy a spot
An army failed to wreck. I go myself
To put fresh courage in my soldiers' hearts
With presence and example; these ill tidings—
The massacre of Victorinus' troops,
The universal and concerted rise
Of these barbaric tribes—gives easy cause
For apprehension to the boldest.

FAUSTINA. Ah!
What are *my* apprehensions you must guess.
How shall I with anxiety be racked
About your health, and your successful arms.
Listen, my lord. I know you full of thought
For all things appertaining to the State,
Though for your personal glory and applause
Too careless: if in this unblessed campaign
The gods should be malicious, and you die
—Alas! alas! that I must say these things,
But it becomes me as the Emperor's wife
To do this violence to myself with words—
If you should die, my lord, being no more young,
Broken in health, unsuited for the hardships
Of rough campaigning in the wintry North,

If you should die, have you made no provision
For your successor?

MARCUS. Whom the Senate wills
Is my successor.

FAUSTINA. Were it not as wise
To associate him with you ere you go;
Lest, your firm grip relaxed, grim anarchy
Should lift its head among us?

MARCUS. I had thought,
If years allowed me, to appoint our son
—The only one that has been spared to us—
As my successor.

FAUSTINA. Name him ere you go.

MARCUS. He is too young, and has not shown such virtues
Of dignity and self-command, as needs
Should mark a ruler; he is petulant,
And petulantly will he use his power—
Do harm to all the world, and his own soul.

FAUSTINA. Indeed——

MARCUS. I say Commodus is too young
For me to name him Emperor ere I go.
If Rome upon my death desires him,
It is the Roman will; but youthful faults
Exalted to such state take on the show

Of odious vices. I'll not use my voice
To wrong him so.

FAUSTINA. Yet he is Cæsar now,
Which is a presage of his future fortune.

MARCUS. What time is given me I'll surely use
To bend his mind to virtue, but not now
Will I put in his hands the government.

FAUSTINA. I cannot move you?

MARCUS. Not in this, my wife.

FAUSTINA. What are these faults of his? A love of wine,
Of which he'll sicken by his own excess,
And a boyish interest in public shows
Which you do so condemn.

MARCUS. Condemn? Not I.
Why should I blame the property of things?

FAUSTINA. And yet you strive to alter Nature.

MARCUS. Ay!
Yet I might burst with protest, and the world
Would still do as the world does.

Enter PETRONILLA.

PETR. Lady!

FAUSTINA. Yes.

PETR. Lord Cassius is without.

FAUSTINA (*to* MARCUS). Shall he come in?

MARCUS. He'll entertain you better than I may,
And I must leave you.

FAUSTINA. Bear my words in mind.
Be careful of your health.

MARCUS. As much as needs.

Enter CASSIUS; *he salutes in silence.*

MARCUS (*going*). You will redeem your promise, Cassius,
To tell the Empress all your Eastern tales?
It's well, it's well, you come in happy time,
For she is sad; divert her, then, my friend.
[*Exit* MARCUS AURELIUS.

CASSIUS. Give me your hands; they have been in my dreams.
Thus do I crush them!

FAUSTINA. Cassius, what is this?

CASSIUS. Call out the pretorian guard, and let their spears
Meet in my heart. Oh, woman, must you come
With that imperial tread that goes upon
The hearts of men? You could not let me pass
In my undinted armour, but must call me
With that low voice: "Come hither, Cassius."
And you must take my hands within your two—

O gods! give me your hands!—you took them so,
Saying, "Look, Petronilla, his are brown,"
And laid your own like moonshine over them,
Until the deadly poison of the moon
Has crept through my sick veins.

FAUSTINA. Let go my hands.

CASSIUS. Call out the guard; I will not let them go
Until your servants lop my wrists away;
And then my fingers shall entwine you still,
Making a fetter all the world can see.

FAUSTINA. Cassius!

CASSIUS. You shall not speak my name!
Those syllables can be intolerable
Upon your lips; you have the Circe voice,
And Antoninus better had deserved
The name of Pious, to have made you dumb
Or ever you had spoken.

FAUSTINA. My good friend,
Loosen my hands; come here and sit by me,
And tell me of this fever which but now
Afflicts you; yesterday you seemed in health.

CASSIUS. Oh, yesterday—was it but yesterday
I was an honourable man—O gods!
Was it but yesterday you came to me

Giving your ring? I flung it back at you,
And now am beggared and bankrupt of all worth—
Even my manhood.

FAUSTINA. Will you wear my ring?

CASSIUS. You'll give it me again? I will not have it;
It is a visible symbol of my shame.
What! marked you how the Emperor spoke to me?
He smiled, and called me friend, and touched my shoulder
In going out. Oh, traitress! can you stand
Impassive there, with that imperial brow
Betraying him?

FAUSTINA. How is he then betrayed?

CASSIUS. He has befriended me since we were youths;
And, though he knew I had been taught to hate
The name of Emperor, entrusted me
With foreign legions and supreme commands.
I might have killed him, loving him the while,
As Brutus once slew Cæsar. I have seen you
Day after day, and only marked your beauty
As one man may observe another's wife,
Till, in an evil hour, you summoned me,
"Cassius, come hither!"—What a thing am I!
For mark, Faustina, if it can be love
To know you are adulterous, and hate
Your lust, your baseness, and your perfidy,

The lies you speak with your smooth-seeming tongue,
The lures you look at men with your veiled eyes—
If this be love, then only do I love you.

FAUSTINA. And yet I think you love me, Cassius.

CASSIUS. I will not love you. 'Tis a cankerous growth
That roots it in my flesh; I'll pluck it out,
Although I bleed to death. What other men
Have doted on your eyelids and your eyes?
What other men has your sweet body drawn
To ruin? Oh, perfidious woman, go!
I would the lightning had struck out my eyes
Ere ever I beheld you!

FAUSTINA (*rising*). Ah, poor fool!
What is this thing that men call chastity?
Shall roses be less sweet if many eyes
Behold their beauty? Is soft music harsh
Because it sleeps in more than one man's ear?
Look up and see me. Am I not indeed
A vessel for love's uses? Why should I
Deny love's wages?

CASSIUS. Ah, Faustina! (*Grasps her knees.*)

FAUSTINA. Nay!
Go home, good Cassius; you love me not.
You pin your offerings to continence,
As if you sought a maiden for your son

To wed with. What do I with such things, pray?
These are the little virtues of our state
To cover nakedness. Is Nature covered?
Is Nature virtuous? Naked, hot, and cruel.
What do you here with me? Go home! Farewell!

CASSIUS. You bid me go, yet bind me on the rack
With treble cords. I rushed to you to-day,
Driven by an intolerable scourge,
Hoping for nothing, yet impelled to come.

FAUSTINA. What do you hope for now?

CASSIUS. Faustina——

FAUSTINA. Stay!
Avidius, do you love me? Do not speak.
Will you possess me?

CASSIUS. What words shall I vow?

FAUSTINA. Vow not at all; your look shall be enough.
Your beard is like a lion's crinkled mane
On your great chest! . . . The Emperor once dead,
Who is so likely then as Cassius
To step into his shoes?

CASSIUS. What do you say?

FAUSTINA. That if you wish you may be Emperor.

CASSIUS (*rising and walking about*).
No, no, it cannot be—no Emperor!

FAUSTINA. Why, will you buffet fortune in the face,
Offering you such gifts?

CASSIUS. No Emperor!

FAUSTINA. What are these scruples, now, that gnaw your brain?

CASSIUS. The Emperor yet lives——

FAUSTINA. Will you dare nothing
To win me?

CASSIUS. O great Jove, now strike me deaf,
To have heard such wickedness!

FAUSTINA. Well! well! enough.
O Venus, how they waver! The Emperor,
Always a sufferer, grows old and frail,
And his campaign among the Northern tribes
Is like—less fate plays tricks—to settle all;
Do you then cause your legions, as you may,
To proclaim you Emperor.

CASSIUS. It cannot be!

FAUSTINA. Not be! Why not?

CASSIUS. I have sworn a solemn oath
—Oh, doubly traitorous, is there nothing true
In all my actions?—I have sworn an oath
To join with certain others here in Rome,
And make the world republican again.

FAUSTINA. So—is that so!

CASSIUS. Now call your guard indeed,
To strike my head off.

FAUSTINA. Doubting Cassius!
Do I not love you? Nay, though you had sworn
To bring about my death, must I not love you?
What are these men with whom you swore an oath?

CASSIUS. Quintilius——

FAUSTINA. A peevish demagogue,
That finds himself affronted in all greatness
That shows his little stature; he's a mole,
Who ever must be working underground
To throw up mud-heaps. He to think of Rome!
He's jealous of the name of Cassius,
And when he's made you throw your weapons by,
He'll net you.

CASSIUS. There are others—honest men——

FAUSTINA. Yet not so honest that, had they your gifts,
Your virtues, and your prowess, and your name,
They would not use them, Cassius, as you may.

CASSIUS. Why would you that I should be Emperor?

FAUSTINA. Because I love you.

CASSIUS. Give me proof of it.

FAUSTINA. I put my ring upon your finger, love,
And bind it with two kisses. Come to me
When you are Emperor, and I'll redeem it
With what you will.

CASSIUS. Speak on, though you speak treason;
Speak on, although your words are poisonous;
For I must listen, just to watch your face,
The undulating movement of your brows,
The quiver of your lips that meet and part,
Holding my life between them. Here I'll lie,
And you speak what you will. I'll have no honour
Except Faustina; let her speak a lie,
And it shall shriek down the assembled truths
Of all the universe. I'll have no duty
Except Faustina; thus I break all ties
As if they were this string upon this lute,
All oaths, all obligations—hear them jar;
That is the strangled voice of conscience—Break!
I will remember nothing in the world
Except Faustina; memory be blank
Except about her movements and her smile,
Her gracious gestures. Swear you'll come to me
When I am Emperor.

FAUSTINA. That day I come.
You will be careful, not wreck all with haste?

CASSIUS. I'll be as cunning as a wolf, as bold
As our Assyrian lions, yet as patient
As Jove himself, till you are mine.

FAUSTINA. Till then,
Good-bye, my lover.

CASSIUS. Can I go from you?

FAUSTINA. To win me, and to wear me openly.
I dare not see you any more, Avidius,
Ere you return to Syria; but I'll write.
You'll send me many letters?

CASSIUS. Come with me,
And we'll defy the Emperor and the world.

FAUSTINA. What is this madness? Will you ruin me?
You do imperil me to stay so long
In my apartments. Go at once, dear friend.
I will arrange how you may write to me,
And I to you.

CASSIUS. I cannot leave you so.

FAUSTINA. What you desire is impossible.
Go, and have patience.

CASSIUS. Yet one kiss.

FAUSTINA (*falling into his arms*). Well! Well!

END OF ACT I.

ACT II.

SCENE I.—*A hall in* CASSIUS' *Palace at Antioch. There is a dais at back of scene, on which is a throne, and a small exit from dais. There are also exits on right and left of scene.*

Enter QUINTILIUS, *meeting* DRUENTIANO.

QUIN. Have you heard the news?

DRU. What news?

QUIN. The best.
The Emperor is dead.

DRU. Is this the truth?

QUIN. Indeed it is authentic. His campaign
Against the Marcomanni in the North,
With all the rigours of a wintry camp,
Has done for us what we had worser done.

DRU. Is the news generally known?

QUIN. I think not.
He died upon his journey hitherward
To visit all his Eastern provinces.

I had this from a messenger himself,
The first of Antioch.

DRU. And Cassius?

QUIN. I came to find him, for we must consult
About our action.

DRU. Have you not remarked
His temper lately? He avoids us all,
And even with myself, his son-in-law,
His speech is curt and guarded. Is it likely
He wavers in his resolution?

QUIN. No;
He dare not now betray us. We must find him,
And urge him to fulfil those promises
He made among us. Could he now be false,
Or is it but a fancy of your brain,
Bred of our heavy inactivity?

DRU. It is no fancy; when you tell the news
Mark but his face.

QUIN. It's true; I have remarked
Whene'er one spoke the name of Emperor,
His countenance did alter, but I thought
He ever was averse to what we urged
About the Emperor's death.

DRU. And yet he seemed
To dwell desiringly upon that death.

QUIN. Few may read Cassius, fewer still control;
Yet we'll control him. See where Rufus comes

Enter RUFUS.

RUFUS. Friends, have you heard the news?

DRU. This moment past.
Where is my father?

RUFUS. That I cannot tell;
Not in the Palace, for I sought him here,
Eager to give him word; I thought, indeed,
He was with you.

QUIN. It is too many days
Since he has voluntarily talked with me.
This death comes surely in the nick of time
To clinch his purpose.

DRU. What that purpose is
I think we guess not.

Enter TITUS *and* HORATIUS.

TITUS. By the gods of hell,
It is impossible! Come, all of you,
And fall upon your swords. I would the day

Had never dawned this morning than to dawn
On such a deed.

RUFUS. What is the matter?

TITUS. Matter?
Matter to smother up the face of earth
Beneath its filth! I tell you there he stood,
Without a word, without a finger raised
To stop the shouting legions, as they cried:
"Hail, Emperor!"

QUIN. O gods!

TITUS. I say he smiled,
With one hand at his hip, where was the sword
That should have cleaved the throats that shouted lies;
The other hand hung careless by his side,
Until he did advance it to the lips
Of the first rank, slubbering centurion
Who kneeled to kiss it.

QUIN. Who is this you speak of?

TITUS. Of whom but Cassius? I spit out the name
As one does foulness! Have you understood?
He stayed there unprotesting, while the soldiers
Proclaimed him Emperor.

HORATIUS. They vested him
With the imperial purple, in his hand

Put the insignia, and round his brow
The royal fillet.

DRU. Cassius Emperor!

TITUS. I swear it was a subtle, long-laid plan.
Cassius was watching, as his custom is,
The legions exercising on the plain,
When comes a horseman, on a sweated horse,
Spurring towards him; cries, "The Emperor's dead,
Aurelius is dead!" and tumbles off,
Swooned with fatigue. Then all the soldiery
Stood motionless and dumb, as if entranced,
Till Cassius, rising in his stirrups, cried:
"The Emperor is dead! Who rules instead?"
Then all men spied upon their neighbour's looks,
Breathing uneasily, till Maximus
Headed his legion with the thunderous shout:
"Be you, be you our Emperor, Cassius!"
Which at the end, men catching from men's mouths
Contagion, was a universal cry;
For those who might have spoken stood abashed
Before the acclamations of the rest,
And no dissentient voice dare lift itself.
Whereat this Cassius gets off his horse
And goes among them, saying, "Is there one

Who will not have me for his Emperor?
Let him speak now; I stand to answer him."

QUIN. You should have spoken then.

TITUS. And had their swords
Clash in my riddled carcass?

QUIN. You had died
Recording, as a Roman should, your protest.

TITUS. I came to tell you, and concert a plan
Of action.

QUIN. I will go to Cassius,
And if all grace and honour be not dead,
I'll make him feel ashamed.

DRU. Hush! Here he comes.

Enter CASSIUS, *in the state of an Eastern Emperor, with pomp and music, and* Slaves *strewing flowers. He is accompanied by* MAXIMUS, *his sons* MÆCIANUS *and* HELIODORUS, *his* Tribunes, *and a numerous guard of* Soldiers. *A crowd of* Citizens *of Antioch follow.*

CASSIUS. Detain those men, and bring them here to me.

(CASSIUS *ascends the dais; the conspirators are brought before him.*)

QUIN. Force me not to your presence, Cassius,
For I would brave the chamber of the gods

To come before you. Bid your music cease,
Unless you fear my voice, will smother up
The acid of my words with sugared sounds.

CASSIUS. Cease music! I am not familiar
With such a word as fear; and least of all
From such tongue-waggers, gutter-rhetorics,
Valiant night-birds, screeching on a roof
Till morning frights them.

QUIN. Yet I'll make you fear.
What do I say, that *I* will make you fear?
Your own bad actions and your broken faith
Shall haunt like furies. Oh, perfidious!
How is your name befouled beyond all help,
And those your acts that once were glorious,
Taking a colour from your present deed,
Unworthy now of beasts.

CASSIUS. You are a fool!
You sit upon too perilous a seat,
Being what you are, to goad me with such words.

QUIN. Oh, Cassius, if I should hold my tongue,
Inanimate objects would take up the tale,
And shriek your treachery.

CASSIUS. You do provoke me.
Although you disapprove the ways and means
Which made me Emperor, yet, now being so,

You would do well to clothe your grievances.
I will have none to ask me of my right
—Mark me, Quintilius, none—whate'er you were,
You are my servant and my subject now,
And I your ruler; swear me loyalty
At once upon your knees.

QUIN. Cut off my legs,
For nowise else my knees shall touch the floor.

CASSIUS. By Styx and Acheron, you shall not flout me;
I am your Emperor.

QUIN. By all the gods
And all the devils in Egypt, you are not!

CASSIUS. I know not why I pause to give the order
That wrenches life from you, Quintilius;
For a lesser matter than these words of yours
I've lined a mile of roadside with men's crosses,
Yet these ten minutes have I spared your life.

QUIN. It is your honour that ties up the tongue
That would disgrace you. Listen, Cassius,
Before it is too late. Recall to mind
The promises you lately made in Rome;
Those bright hopes of the future we have pinned
Upon your name and valour. Will you think
How small a thing it is to have attained

This spurious title in comparison
With what you strove for? Ah! what can you have
As Emperor, you did not have before?
A great name? Greater yet there never was,
Not greatlier honoured, than the name you bore
But yesterday.

CASSIUS. I will not hear him speak!

QUIN. Do you desire the applause of crowds?
You've had it as triumphant general,
And know what breath it's made of. Would you have
The love of all good men? Then throw away
These titles to be called a Roman.

CASSIUS. Gods!
Will one of you not stop his mouth for me?
I will not hear him speak.

QUIN. I'll move you yet.

CASSIUS. Never! I will not hear you!

QUIN. Will you sell
What even the gods must envy in good men,
The purity and lustre of their name,
For a title that, being dead and turned to rot,
Will breed disease in you? Are you a child,
To be taken with a toy, a little gilding,
And a basketful of sweetmeats?

CASSIUS. That's enough!
My own price is my proper business;
I'll argue it with none. Quintilius,
Come here, kneel down, do homage to my hand.
You are my subject, yet I'll call you friend
And give you honours. Say what you will have—
The Governorship of Alexandria?
Or if not, perhaps a command in Spain?
Or if that please you not—for I am fixed
To be your friend when you've acknowledged me—
I'll make you Consul for as long a time
As you desire.

QUIN. (*makes a rush for him, but is prevented*). Ah, you venomous beast!
You'll mock me, offering me the empty husk
Of which you promised wheat. I will not kneel;
I will not do you homage, Cassius:
I spit upon that name. But that these guards
Do hold me, I would strike you like a slave.

CASSIUS. I will not have this. Go, take him away;
Let him be killed.

QUIN. You dare not do this thing.

CASSIUS. I say that he shall die. Take him away,
Or I will choke him with these hands of mine.

Away with him at once! Cover his face;
I will not look upon it.

[QUINTILIUS *is taken out.*

O ye gods!
Faustina! shall we serve our friends like this?
(*He falls back on the throne on the dais; there is a silence.*)

MAXIMUS. What shall be done with these?

CASSIUS (*wearily*). Oh, let them live,
Though they but live to make conspiracies
Against me; let them live as fates decree.
Come hither, Rufus, for I knew you once
As being an honest man. Will you be true?

RUFUS. One honest man, for speaking of the truth,
Speaks nothing any more; yet if I lie,
For lying must I die. Instruct me, then,
What I should speak, lord; and I'll give that coin
Which you gave back to you.

CASSIUS. It is enough!
You do accuse me in those words of yours
More than myself can answer. Go, then, Rufus.
I will not ask you to be true or false;
But if I hear so much as breathed a word
That you conspire against me, you shall die,
Upon the lightest proof that may be hung
Upon a gossamer.

RUFUS. It is agreed.
I thank you for the magnanimity
That spares me a profession.

CASSIUS. For the rest,
Walk warily; you cannot well afford
Gossip about you.

TITUS. Most imperial,
We'll serve you loyally.

CASSIUS. See to it you do.

Enter MESSENGER.

CASSIUS. Who is this fellow?

MESSENGER. Hail, Lord Cassius!
I give you greeting from the Emperor.

ALL. The Emperor!

MESSENGER. He sends you letters, and he bade me say
He cannot travel fast, both horse and foot
Being war-weary with their late campaign;
But he will not delay nor turn aside
Till he reach Antioch, where he desires
You will prepare a lodging for himself,
And for the Empress.

CASSIUS. Ha! Faustina, too!

MESSENGER. Further, the Emperor says——

CASSIUS. What Emperor?

MESSENGER. My lord——!

DRU. We heard the Emperor was dead.

TITUS. The news came now——

RUFUS. When did you see him last?

MAXIMUS. Came you direct?

MESSENGER. I posted here, my lord.

RUFUS. The rumour, then, was false!

TITUS. I thought it was.

(*Whisperings among the crowd*, CASSIUS *motionless.*)

("*I had a portent.*"

"*What will happen now?*"

"*Alas! Quintilius!*"

"*He died too soon.*")

MESSENGER. What shall I say, lord, to the Emperor?

CASSIUS. There is none other Emperor than myself.

MESSENGER. My lord——

RUFUS. Ha, Cassius!

MAXIMUS. Who spoke?

TITUS. Not I.

CASSIUS. I say there is no other Emperor.
Go back to him who sent you. Let him know

That, weary of his philosophic rule,
His court of pedants and of rhetoricians,
The Roman world proclaims me Emperor,
Speaking through these eight legions stationed here,
And all the citizens of Antioch,
And the preponderating influence
Of all the East; moreover, let him know
You saw here gathered in my company
Many, the best in Rome; they are the earnest
Of that support the Senate will afford.
Look round you, then, and see. Is this not so?

MAXIMUS. It is so, lord.

CASSIUS. Come here, Horatius,
You, Titus—is it not so?

TITUS. Ay, my lord.

CASSIUS. You, Rufus?

RUFUS. As you will.

CASSIUS. Recount these things
To him who sent you. If he will fulfil
His protestations, let him put aside
This power which he hates; let stronger hands
Take the imperial sceptre, which he found
So heavy. Go!

MESSENGER. My lord——

CASSIUS. From now begins
The rule of Cassius. Let it be proclaimed
It shall begin in bounty and in peace;
For here in Antioch all those in debt
Shall be absolved; all who are creditors
Shall be contented from my privy purse.
Moreover, for a week all citizens
Shall find their entertainment at our cost;
There shall be casks of wine in every street,
And tables spread with food where all may feast;
And contests in the circus, men and beasts,
And naval battles, and the Roman wars
Down to our day, proportionately played
With proper arms and dress—no play of schools,
But point-to-point work, and no quarter shown.
Moreover, for two days in every week
We will keep open court, that all may come
And cry their grievances, and get redress,
Down to the meanest beggar. Make this known.
(*These words of* CASSIUS *are cheered by the populace.*)

CASSIUS. For our good soldiers, who have followed us
Through hardships and through perils, they shall share
Prosperity with us. A thousand drachmas
Shall be each soldier's portion; five times more
For each centurion, and in degree

To all our officers. This is the first
Of many gifts, so that they serve us well.
(*The* Soldiers *cheer* CASSIUS, *with cries of "We will! We will! Ave, Imperator!"*)

CASSIUS. Disperse, and give us leisure now, my friends,
To make these dispositions.
(*The crowd begins to disperse, the* Soldiers *going last.*)

CASSIUS (*to Mœcianus*). Here, my lad.
You must at once to Alexandria
And there proclaim us; they have proved them loyal:
Let them remain so.

MÆCIANUS. I will go at once.
[*Exit* MÆCIANUS.

CASSIUS (*calling a* CENTURION, *and pointing to* RUFUS, *etc., who are just going*).
See you those men? They must be kept in sight;
And your head falls if they leave Antioch.

CENTURION. I'll watch them, lord.

CASSIUS. Give orders to the gates.
[*Exit* CENTURION.

CASSIUS (*calls aside the* MESSENGER). Saw you the Empress?

MESSENGER. Empress, lord?

CASSIUS. Faustina!

MESSENGER. Yes, lord.

CASSIUS. How did she look?

MESSENGER. I think in health.

CASSIUS. Merry or grave?

MESSENGER. Of a calm, changeless brow,
As I remember her.

CASSIUS. Ah, torturing!
Unchanged, unchanged as ever, that cold smile.

MESSENGER. I saw her seated by the Emperor's side
When I received his messages to you;
She smiled, with one hand propped beneath her head,
And said, "Our greetings, too, for Cassius."

CASSIUS. She said that? It is well. Here's money for you;
Depart upon your way.

MESSENGER (*going*). Gods give you health!

CASSIUS. Here, fellow!

MESSENGER. Did you call me, lord?

CASSIUS. Come here!
What was the colour of the robe she wore?

MESSENGER. Yellow, I think, my lord.

CASSIUS. Here is this ring
For your pains, my man.

MESSENGER (*going*). O gods! the generous gift.

CASSIUS. Where is this blockhead? Fellow, here, come back!
Surely you have forgotten to deliver
Some of your message?

MESSENGER. No, my lord, indeed.

CASSIUS. Was there not some word from the Empress yet?

MESSENGER. Nothing, upon my oath!

CASSIUS. You loiter here!
What are you waiting for? You look for more,
After so many gifts? Out of my sight!
[CASSIUS *waves aside* MESSENGER, *and exit hurriedly.*

SCENE 2.—*The* EMPEROR'S *tent at his camp in Illyricum.*
MARCUS AURELIUS, JULIAN, VECTILIANUS.

MARCUS. My messenger's returned from Antioch?

VECT. And prays to see you.

MARCUS. Fetch him in to me.
[*Exit* VECTILIANUS.
I fear this haste and this anxiety
To see me, promise little happy news.

JULIAN. I pray the gods, my lord, it be not so;
After your long and arduous campaign
Against the Marcomanni, it's high time
You should return to Rome and know some peace.

MARCUS. If I must run about to look for peace,
I should pursue an ignis fatuus,
And with but poor success. I'll woo it here,
Or where I may be.

JULIAN. Be it nowhere worse.
I've a presentiment of coming ill
With this returning messenger.

MARCUS. Why, friend,
To fear it you do make it doubly dread,
While, if you fear it not, it's nothing fearful.

Enter VECTILIANUS *and* MESSENGER.

VECT. The messenger, my lord.

MESSENGER. Alas, my lord,
That I, unhappy, am made by the gods
The vessel for the evil news they give!
Visit not on me the unhappy fate
That so constrains me to be odious.

MARCUS. Tell me your news, and fear no punishment;
It falls on sin alone. Speak shortly, then.

MESSENGER. My lord, I posted straight to Antioch,
As you commanded me; but, being arrived,
I found such press of people in the streets
I hardly could come through them, till I cried:

"Room for the Emperor's messenger!" At that
They cried that you were dead, and rushed upon me,
To pull me from my horse; but, setting spurs
And drawing sword, I reached the Palace gate,
And so to Cassius. But when I spoke,
Delivering your message, he exclaimed,
"What Emperor? There is none other Emperor
Than I myself."

MARCUS. Ah, Cassius!

JULIAN. O gods!
Foul treachery!

MARCUS. Proceed!

MESSENGER. He bade me say
To him who sent me—those, lord, were his words—
The world did tire of your Stoic rule,
Your court of lawyers and philosophers,
And chose a man of action for their ruler;
Let you perform what you had oft professed,
And give the sceptre to a stronger hand,
Which would know how to wield it.

JULIAN. O false tongue,
And falser heart! Why did you not take heed
When you were warned against him, my good lord?

MARCUS. I thought to make him true by trusting him.

JULIAN. And he rewards you with ingratitude
As never yet was equalled.

MARCUS. Do you know
That epigram Antisthenes once made?—
"It is a kingly part performing good,
Reaping reproach." Bear that in mind.
(*To* MESSENGER.) Proceed!
Tell me of how the people seemed disposed
To Cassius' pretensions.

MESSENGER. Lord, I saw
Maximus there, at Cassius's right hand,
And all the others of the noted men
Among the legions.

MARCUS. It must needs be so.
He'll carry all his army in his train;
Their loyalty is a thing too marketable,
While Maximus has always been his friend.
Whom saw you else?

MESSENGER. Too many noble Romans,
Whom I had gladlier missed—Horatius,
Petronius, Titus, Rufus.

MARCUS. Him as well?
Saw you Quintilius?

MESSENGER. No, lord.

MARCUS. That's strange!
I ever thought him peevish of control,
Factious, rebellious. I have seen him often
Whispering in men's ears their grievances,
Till they believed him. Yet he was not there?

MESSENGER. No, my lord.

MARCUS. Well, the better. For the rest,
How seemed the common mind disposed to him?

MESSENGER. Why, they were huddled all around the walls,
With such bewildered looks as if the earth
Broke up beneath their feet. None spoke, few moved,
But kept on Cassius an uneasy eye,
As if a flock of sheep should find a lion
Pasturing with them, wonder if his maw
Would long be crammed with grass; yet none dare move,
For fear destruction fall upon the first.

MARCUS. That's an ill augury for Cassius' rule.

MESSENGER. They heartened up in looks and loudly cheered
When he had promised games and festivals,
Donations, and redress of grievances.

MARCUS. Such is the voice of popular applause!
Yet Cassius will wrong his soul so much
For its possession.

MESSENGER. Cassius had the air
Of one in fever. Never in my life
Have I seen man so changed; he stamped the floor,
Plucked at his sword-belt, bit upon his beard,
And threw ferocious glances round the crowd,
Yet fearful all the same. That discipline
That made him famous, surely was relaxed,
For every soldier had an insolence
About him, as it seemed, that, having made,
Each could unmake again an Emperor.

MARCUS. Your eyes and ears have served me in good stead.
It seems that this revolt of Cassius
Does not express the universal need
To have another Emperor than I,
But it is a small ambition, blown to greatness
By bribery and faction. That being so,
We shall know how to act. Go you at once,
Vectilianus, bid my generals
Assemble all the army near my tent,
Where I will speak to them. Make this news known,
Neither diminished of its gravity,
Nor yet exaggerated by the common voice,
But as we've heard it.

VECT. Lord, it shall be done.

[*Exit* VECTILIANUS.

MARCUS. Bring me those papers, Julian, that came
Lately from Rome, about the law of slaves
And manumission. I will deal with it
Ere I am sucked into the vortices
Of troubled action.

MESSENGER. Lord——!

MARCUS. Go, rest yourself;
Your journey has been ardent.

MESSENGER. Pardon, lord.

MARCUS. For what offence?

MESSENGER. My future speech, my lord.
I have some matters for your private ear;
Will you not hear me?

MARCUS. Most assuredly.
Julian, we'll consider of these laws
Another time.

JULIAN (*low to him*). I do not like it, lord,
To leave you here alone. This man has come
From Cassius, your death would well repay;
He may be bribed to it.

MARCUS. I do not think so.

JULIAN. He has a disconcerted look and mien.

MARCUS. Although he be unfaithful, what of that?
While I'm of use alive in Nature's scheme,
Alive I shall continue; when she needs
But my corporeal dust, from which to make
New forms again, my life being finished then,
Why should I make a shadow in the sun?

JULIAN. But yet I pray you——

MARCUS. Go; you have our leave.
[*Exit* JULIAN.
Come here. What are these news for us alone?

MESSENGER. I have reported all that Cassius said
Before his court; but, ere I came away,
He called me back, and, holding of my wrist
And peering in my face, he questioned me
About the Empress.

MARCUS. Ah! the Empress! Well?

MESSENGER. I answered that I saw her in good health
When I took leave of you, and thereupon
He muttered in his beard and gave me money,
And so dismissed me.

MARCUS. So! You may depart.
I thank you for your pains in telling me.

MESSENGER. That is not all, my lord. He called me back
To ask of me what coloured robe she wore,

And then he gave this ring; and yet again
Summoned me, asking, Was there nothing more?
Had I remembered all? Was there not something
Touching the Empress? When I answered "No,"
He drove me from his presence with hard words.

MARCUS. Is this the key unlocks you, Cassius?

Enter FAUSTINA.

FAUSTINA. My lord, are you at leisure. May I enter?

MARCUS. Come in, Faustina. (*To* MESSENGER) For you, take my thanks;
You have reported faithfully and well.
[MESSENGER *salutes and exit.*

MARCUS. Come here, Faustina. Is this not the dress
You wore when I despatched that messenger
With word to Cassius?

FAUSTINA. It is, my lord,
And shall be worn no more; it is unlucky,
Taking its hue from unpropitious days.
This moment only have I heard the news
Of Cassius' revolt.

MARCUS. What! Are you sure?

FAUSTINA. How otherwise? It is but just declared.

MARCUS. How otherwise indeed! I will not think
How otherwise. But say, is it not strange

Mine enemy should ask about my wife:
Was she in health, what coloured robe she wore,
Was there no word about her?

FAUSTINA. Whence comes this?

MARCUS. My messenger reported such the words
Spoken by Cassius.

FAUSTINA. Almighty gods!
Has Cassius stooped to such unworthy tricks?
Has he found such a way to wreck us both—
He who was worthy to be called your friend?
How should he not know that this messenger
Would carry everything he said to you,
And took this subtle and perfidious means
To sever us? Lord, look upon my face,
(*She kneels beside him.*)
And through this mask of flesh transfix my soul.

MARCUS. My eyes are grown too dim for reading souls;
I stumble o'er my own.

FAUSTINA. Shall Cassius,
Your enemy, have such a credit with you
As to discredit me?

MARCUS. My enemy!
There's no one in the world may call him so.
Get up, Faustina! Speak no more of this.

FAUSTINA. If you do doubt me, as your words imply,
Put me away, divorce me from your side,
Banish me, kill me; 'tis no greater ill
Than to be banished from your confidence.

MARCUS. If I do doubt you, it recoils on me,
Making a wound almost intolerable.

FAUSTINA. By Serapis! you doubt me; that's enough.
If you will take my life away, it's little
That you deprive me of; the years are long,
And I long weary of all words and deeds.
Do Cassius this pleasure: let him know
Slander at last has had its filthy way,
And I discredited.

MARCUS. Not so——

FAUSTINA. Ah, gods!
What will he more? Has he not filched from you
Most traitorously the Empire; now from me
My reputation? Will he strip us stark,
And send us naked our declining days?
For nothing else remains to you and me
Save our poor rags.

MARCUS. Ah, passionate of speech,
I'll question you no more; and you, forgive
This Cassius——

FAUSTINA. Forgive! Impossible!

MARCUS. Why so?

FAUSTINA. He's injured me.

MARCUS. That cannot be.
Only our own selves injure our own souls.

FAUSTINA. Do you forgive him?

MARCUS. Most assuredly.

FAUSTINA. Nay, generosity to evil beings
Benefits nothing; they but hate the more
Their benefactor.

MARCUS. That should touch him not.
Give me your hand; I will forget his words,
As you shall also. Can we not forgive
This poor, wild Cassius, all afret and chafed
With the little goad, ambition?

FAUSTINA. Oh, my lord,
Men will misunderstand this show of yours,
And call it cowardice. Is it not plain
That you and Cassius cannot live your lives
In the same world, unless you should consent
To divest yourself of titles, and resign
Wealth, state, and power to him, and with them——

MARCUS. What?
I would resign all these, and count it little,

Could I be sure that good would so accrue
To the world I govern.

FAUSTINA. Gods! were I a man
None should have dared rebel against my rule,
For I would make a pile of slaughtered dead
Pyramid-high, and drive my chariot
From here to Antioch upon men's bodies.

MARCUS. I would not have a sword drawn to confirm
Aurelius as Emperor.

FAUSTINA. Yet but now
I met you coming from a bloody war
Among the Marcomanni; you were stern
Almost to harshness, I have heard it said,
In dealing with them.

MARCUS. A necessity;
For being chosen many years ago
To rule the world, I must deliver up
To my successor, when the time shall come,
Better inheritance than I received.
And there are many of my subjects now
Who do reproach me for the stringent laws
Against the Christian sect I've put in force,
As being too harsh, yet I have felt the need
So to assert the State's authority,

Which they subvert with teachings and with acts.
But do you think my soul delights itself
With their base torments; that I feed my thoughts,
Beast-like, upon their maimed and bleeding flesh;
Or, like a foreign god in obscene rites,
Savour the burning smell of human bodies?
These things are all the evil of my state
Which I must bear; I bear them as I may.
But for this Cassius—if I thought it well
That Rome should have him as her Emperor,
Emperor he should be, though he should do
As other men to those whose seat they took,
And kill me; yet I would not draw a sword
If only mine own ill should come thereby.

Enter VECTILIANUS.

VECT. My lord, the legions are drawn up outside,
Awaiting you.

MARCUS. I come at once.

(*The side of the tent is raised and fastened back by slaves, showing the army drawn up in orderly ranks, headed by their officers. The Emperor advances to the entrance, facing them.*)

MARCUS. Soldiers and countrymen, I have not called you
To hear my lamentations, nor to watch

A useless anger vented. Why be angry
Against the circumstances gods allow,
All things to them being possible alike,
Therefore permissible? Yet will we grieve
For one whom the injustice of his fellows
Brings to misfortune; such a one am I;
For, being just returned from arduous wars
Against the Marcomanni, hardly yet
New skin grown on your wounds, or old marks rubbed
Out of your armour, but I must demand
Further and greater efforts. These events
That are reported lead to civil war,
Which is the greatest evil that can press
Upon a wretched country; and, worse evil,
The man who drives us to it was our friend,
Whom we have loved beyond the ordinary.
Believe me that I would not shed your blood
To make my own seat firm; but, once allow
Any man's hand to twitch a stone away
Out of the temple of our laws, what laws
Shall then remain? I call upon you, then,
Weary although you be, few as you are,
To meet the troops of Cassius in the field,
And rout them as you routed all the hordes
Of those barbarian tribes. Your hearts are great
Although your ranks are small; we'll terminate

Inglorious rebellion gloriously,
And show that even in harsh civil strife
Justice may temper valour.

(*He advances from the tent down the line of the legions.*
FAUSTINA, *alone, in the tent.*)

END OF ACT II.

ACT III.

SCENE.—*The hall of* CASSIUS' *Palace at Antioch.*

CASSIUS; MANILIUS *writing.*

CASSIUS. No word yet from Faustina? Can it be
Her messengers are stopped? I have not heard
For nearly fourteen days. Give me again
The letter I received the last.

MANILIUS. It's here.

CASSIUS (*reading*). "Let me not be too tardy to acclaim
Cassius Emperor; I am his own
When he shall come and take me." Ah! but when?
I'm tied to Antioch by a thousand cords,
And dare not leave howe'er my spirit chafe,
While whispering sedition in our streets
Goes busily up and down. By such small things
Am I made purposeless! Yet, should I draw
My soldiers from their quarters, march them out
To meet Aurelius, I might return
Victorious indeed, to find the gates

Slammed in my face. (*Pacing up and down*) Oh, now, by Hercules!
Faustina, you are farther from my clasp
Than when, you Empress, I but Cassius,
Met first long years ago. Manilius,
Write her again, and say that we must know
Aurelius's purpose, and the disposition
Among his soldiers; let her, if she can
With safety, send us a precise account
Of all his movements.

MANILIUS (*writing*). I will write, my lord.
Shall I not also ask how it will turn
To sow donations through Aurelius's camp,
That we may reap a crop of sturdy fellows
Grown of our golden seed?

CASSIUS. Ay, do! ay, do!
Though there is naught to fear upon that side.
They dare not risk a battle, being but half
Of what we number, worn with travelling
And with their late campaign. The issue lies
In our hands.

MANILIUS. Dare we but leave Antioch,
And meet them in the field.

CASSIUS. That's so, that's so!
Gods give me patience! I must root myself

Here in this city, lest the curs, grown bold
Behind my back, should yap about my heels,
Helping my adversary—all the while
Aurelius progressing through the East,
Gaining allegiance, gaining numbers, strength.
Write, write, you fool!

MANILIUS. My lord!

CASSIUS. Why write you not,
You ass?

MANILIUS. What shall I write, my gracious lord?

CASSIUS. Bid the Empress let us know a way
How we may come at her; for we will snatch her
Out of Aurelius's tent if she'll but say
She will be ready. Give me here the pen,
And I will write. "Faustina"—now indeed
My pen stops at her name; what I would say
Hangs in my mouth, while still my fingers trace
"Faustina" and "Faustina" and "Faustina."
(*Throws down pen.*)
I'll have no more of letters. What are words
But the playthings of an empty brain, slow pulse?
I'll have no more of letters, while the days
Chafe like old sores beneath new armour's rub,
And all my nights are blasted with hot dreams
Of angry passion. Let me once assuage

This fierce and violent tyranny of the blood,
I shall be Cassius again, and rule
As Cassius ruled; I will make history
Forget what I've done evil in great deeds;
I will assure my Empire in the East,
Extend the glory of the Roman arms
From Gaul to China——

Enter a SLAVE.

SLAVE. Lord, a messenger.

CASSIUS. Admit him instantly.

SLAVE. He's here, my lord.

Enter a MESSENGER.

CASSIUS. What is your message? Have you letters for me?

MESSENGER. No letters, lord; my news is in my mouth.

CASSIUS. Ah, better, better! Speak it.

MESSENGER. Ctesiphon——

CASSIUS. Ah, Ctesiphon! Gods! what have I to do
With Ctesiphon? You stand and mouth at me
With Ctesiphon! By all the gods of hell
I'll slit that mouth of yours, that is so glib
With polysyllables! Next time you spit
You shall not spit such words out!

MANILIUS. Gracious lord,
Will you not hear his message?

CASSIUS. Why, I wait!
Is the fool dumb? Speak out!

MESSENGER. Alas, my lord!
I know not how to soften to your ears
What must offend them——

CASSIUS. Ha!

MESSENGER. My news is bad;
For the inhabitants of Ctesiphon
Have risen against you.

CASSIUS. Are you not, then, come
From Antoninus' camp?

MESSENGER. Lord, I was sent
From the Parthian frontier.

CASSIUS. You abuse my patience;
Why said you not so at the first? Proceed!

MESSENGER. All the city is astir, my lord,
With warlike preparations; they rebuild
The walls you battered down, and arm the ramparts
With spikes, and flints, and nails; they've driven in
Hundreds of head of cattle, which they kill
To save their pasturage; they salt the flesh,

And from the hides make thongs and ropes, to rig
Stone-throwing engines. Even you may see
The little children piling up of stones
Against your coming; and the steadfast look
On all men's faces shows that they will die
Upon their walls, ere yield them up to you.

CASSIUS. Then die upon them they most surely shall.
That they should dare! Must I teach lessons twice?
There shall this time no Ctesiphon remain
To call me for a third time to their walls.
Here's time for action; in the clash of arms
My soul shall find distraction. Summon here,
Manilius, towards the hour of noon,
My generals, and the tribunes, and the chief
Among the citizens of Antioch.
Look also that Horatius be here,
With Rufus and those other friends of ours
Who grace our state so. (*Going.*)

MANILIUS. I will do it, lord.

CASSIUS (*returning*). Write to my son in Alexandria
This news of Ctesiphon, and let him keep
A firm hand on that city; be prepared
When I shall summon him to bring his troops
Into the field. (*Going.*)

MANILIUS. It shall be done, my lord.

CASSIUS (*returning*). Give me that letter. No, the other one
That we were writing. I will send no more;
Letters do only mock us.

[*Exit by small door on dais.*

MESSENGER. How he goes
With hurried and uneven steps. Good friend,
What is the matter with our lord of late?

MANILIUS. You've noticed change, then?

MESSENGER. Change? The Emperor
Is Cassius no longer. Cassius
Was stern of temper, sometimes would be cruel
When policy dictated; but was just
On most occasions, not tyrannical;
Of even temper. Marked you him to-day?
He foamed his speech out like an angry boar.
Into a passion falls he for a word,
And for a word puts on such heavy looks
As he were banned by the immortal gods.

MANILIUS. He is not well.

MESSENGER. Not well, by Hercules!
Was Cassius not used to long fatigues,
Famine and fever, wearing armour on
His wounds undressed with oils? Not well, say you?
Is this the man who could go jestingly

And fast a week? Could march through desert sands
Waterless, yet could drink day in, night out,
With the best among them all?

MANILIUS. There's something else
That makes a sick man of him.

MESSENGER. Ah, but what?

MANILIUS. The commonest disease of all mankind—
Desire for a woman.

MESSENGER. By all the gods!
Let him get cured, then; he is Emperor,
And though poor Cassius' old wrinkled brow
Will never please a lady, she'd be bold
Who dared say, "No."

MANILIUS. Hush, fool! you talk so loud.

MESSENGER. That Cassius should be in such a way;
That Cassius—— His sons are like enough;
But he, at his age! What's the lady's name?

MANILIUS. Faustina, the late Emperor's wife.

MESSENGER. O gods!
Oh, Cupid! Cupid! Cassius in love—
Fie upon decency!—with such a jade,
Who gives more pledges of fertility
Than of her virtue!

MANILIUS. Will you lose your head,
To talk so loudly?

MESSENGER. This, then, made him start,
And fret, and chafe, like Io, the poor cow
Stung by a gadfly.

MANILIUS (*preparing to go, collecting papers*). Hold your silly tongue!

MESSENGER. Here is a notable triumph, on my life,
For Lady Venus. Mars is in her net;
And such a wrinkled, war-worn Mars at that,
With sturdy sons, who may aspire to be
His rivals! Fie upon you, Cassius!
Your grey hairs blush at your concupiscence.

During the above speech re-enter CASSIUS, *unperceived, through door on dais.* MANILIUS *disappears.*

CASSIUS (*with ominous quiet*). Why do you laugh?

MESSENGER. Lord! Lord!

CASSIUS. Why do you laugh?

MESSENGER. Oh, great Augustus, mercy!

CASSIUS (*drawing his dagger*). Come you here!
Why were you merry?

MESSENGER. At a jest, my lord.
(*He drags himself slowly up the steps of the dais.*)

CASSIUS. Tell me your jest, and make me merry too.
The sources of your mirth are withered up
Too suddenly. Come closer to me. (*Stabs him.*) Ah!
Jest for jest; lie there, carrion! (*Passionately.*)
[*Exit* CASSIUS.

MESSENGER. O gods!
I have it! Help there!

Enter RUFUS *and the* CENTURION.

RUFUS. Ah, what have we here?

CENTURION. It is my brother! Caius, lift your head,
Who did this thing?

MESSENGER. It is my death-wound surely,
For Cassius strikes truly.

CENTURION. Cassius!
He stabbed you?

MESSENGER. Ay.

CENTURION. What was the cause of it?

MESSENGER. No cause—a jest—no cause. (*He dies.*)

RUFUS. I fear he's dead——

CENTURION. May all the curses of avenging gods——
You heard what he affirmed? It was a jest,
Cassius slew him for a jest!

RUFUS. I heard.
Such things will tyrants do.

CENTURION. Not Cassius!
I've served beneath him now for fifteen years,
Nor ever knew him slay a man in jest.

RUFUS. And yet your brother—for this is your brother——

CENTURION. Was—is no more.

RUFUS. He said so as he died!

Enter two of the Palace GUARD.

GUARD. Will you give us leave, sir?

CENTURION. Leave for what?

GUARD. We are sent by order of the Emperor,
Who told us to take up what we found here,
And throw it in the ditch outside the walls
For jackals and for vultures.

CENTURION. Hold awhile.
This was an honourable soldier once,
And well reputed in his company.

GUARD. That is not our concern.

CENTURION. The Emperor
Will have forgotten what he bade you do
Five minutes after. I will take this man
And give him burial.

GUARD. We dare not, sir.
We must obey the Emperor's orders. Come!

CENTURION. You shall not lay a hand on him, I say.

RUFUS. Hush! You must stand aside and see him go;
But this is the last outrage tyranny
Can wreck on him, poor wretch!

GUARD. Here, take his heels.
We'd best be prompt; the Emperor is not pleased
With tardy execution of his orders.
[*Exeunt* GUARDS, *bearing the body of the* MESSENGER.

CENTURION. By heaven! I will not bear this.

RUFUS. But you must.
He's dead, and knows no more his cursed lot,
But we're alive, and ill may wait on us
At any moment. I am indiscreet!
You may report this to the Emperor,
And make me lose my head.

CENTURION. I've done with him.

RUFUS. What do you say?

CENTURION. I say I've done with him.
Ah, you are right to view me with mistrust
By this vile office I've been made to play,
Spying upon your actions and your words.
But, knowing you, I've come to hate my part,
Noting your steadfastness, your noble words,
Your scorn of tyranny. This clinches it;
I'll serve no more this upstart Emperor.

RUFUS. Are you in earnest?

CENTURION. Show me but the way
That I may injure him; I'll prove it then.

RUFUS. I know no way. He is too powerful
Here in the midst of Antioch.

CENTURION. Maybe;
But hate shall find a way.

Enter TITUS *and* HORATIUS.

TITUS. Can you not lose your shadow for awhile,
Good Rufus? I have news.

RUFUS. Then bring it forth.
This is our friend.

TITUS. Since when?

CENTURION. Since Cassius
Did throw my brother's body to the dogs
For an idle passion.

TITUS. Ah, it may be soon
When he shall have no power to do these things.
The Emperor Aurelius arrives
Outside the walls of Antioch but now,
And all his soldiers, like a swarm of ants,
Are streaming o'er the plain.

HORATIUS. We may expect
Speedy deliverance from Cassius.

RUFUS. We may expect a speedy death, perhaps,
Aurelius being clement; but what else
Shall he give us?

TITUS. O gods, how we are mocked!
Conspirators whose heads are forfeited
To one man, and their bodies held in durance
To another, who's his rival.

CENTURION. Yet in this
I think I see some way. Come closer, sirs.
I'll send a message to the Emperor,
Bidding him enter by the eastern gate,
Which will be open. I will manage that;
I have an influence among the guard,

Who love not Cassius either. He may enter
Without resistance, ere there shall be time
To call out Cassius' soldiers. Do you then
Tell him your part, and win his clemency.

TITUS. Which is most doubtful.

RUFUS. It is bad enough,
But there is scarce a better. We are caught
Between the upper and the nether stone;
And if we are not slain by Cassius
Before the Emperor comes, are like enough
To meet our death by him.

TITUS. An evil day
When we put hand to this.

CENTURION. I'll undertake
Cassius works no further harm. Good-bye!
[*Exit* CENTURION.

TITUS. What does he mean?

RUFUS. 'Tis safer not to know.

Enter CASSIUS *in the royal purple, with diadem.*

CASSIUS. Strange that a royal robe should be so heavy
On back that has worn armour many years,
And that this fillet should constrain my brow

More than a helmet. Surely I grow old,
To bow beneath this weight of silken stuff.
Whom have we here? Come, Rufus!

RUFUS. Yes, my lord.

CASSIUS. What's this upon the floor here?

RUFUS. Blood, my lord.

CASSIUS. 'Tis well. All men may see that it is blood.
Cover it up, strew roses over it,
Sprinkle with ambergris, but the first dog
That enters noses it.

RUFUS. That's true, my lord.

CASSIUS. "That's true, my lord"—what do you mean by that?
I say it shall be true as I dictate,
Or false as I shall fancy. Do you know
How it came there?

RUFUS. My lord!

CASSIUS. A soldier bled.
Well, what of that? Soldiers have bled before;
It's their profession. Blood! We are not girls,
To faint at sight of it upon the floor.
Are we grown squeamish, who have seen whole towns,
From roof to gutter, blood; old men and children
Lying together, slaughtered? Cover it!

It is unlucky; it was wrongly spilt
Upon our palace floor; there are some acts
That do seem trifling in the scale of sins,
Yet the result of them is imminent,
Dreadful, decisive, plain for all men's eyes.
Who spoke of sins? Did you?

RUFUS. No, lord, indeed.

TITUS. Nor I, my lord.

HORATIUS. Nor I.

CASSIUS. What is a sin?
A kick on Nature's balance, that destroys
Her perfect equilibrium. Good Rufus,
Lend me your shoulder to my throne. O gods!
Heavy this state becomes, and I grow old,
And should have been content to end in peace
The tale of long and honourable days.
This purple is but the ignoble blood
Of molluscs. On my life, is it not strange
We'll stain this robe again from clasp to hem
With blood of friends and kinsmen, that profane
Our solitary honour with a hand
That seeks to share with us this purple dye,
Crushed from a shell-fish, that the fisherman
Brings up in hundreds, yet rejects as food?

Enter MANILIUS.

MANILIUS. My lord, the army of Aurelius
Is sighted from our walls.

CASSIUS. Ha!

MANILIUS. They prepare,
By all appearances, to lay a siege;
And there is come a soldier from the camp
Demanding your surrender.

CASSIUS. Bring him in;
And let my generals and officers
Be summoned here.

MANILIUS. My lord, they wait without.

CASSIUS. I do remember now. Go, fetch them here!
[*Exit* MANILIUS.
Aurelius, we come to grips at last,
And you or I go hence; there's no more time
For looking back and wondering at deeds.
"Were it to do again, would it be done?"
No more sick searchings of the spirit now.
To action! And as things turn, I shall fail
Or else possess Faustina. Ah, no more
I'll think of her! I will forget her name,
Her state, her countenance, her very being,

For fear this youthful frenzy of old blood
Should sap my resolution, making me
Unstable, as boys are.
(*To the* Conspirators.)
Go, all of you,
But see that you attend my state at noon.

RUFUS. We will, my lord.
[*Exeunt* Conspirators.

Enter MANILIUS *with* MAXIMUS *and other* Officers,
DRUENTIANO, HERMIODORUS.

CASSIUS. Come in, come in, my friends!
Be seated; this is our camp council now,
And not a court. Camp manners shall prevail.
You, Maximus, sit here on my right hand;
It's not the first time you have held that place
In warlike councils.

MAXIMUS. That is true enough;
But always openly I spoke my mind.

CASSIUS. And shall do now.

MAXIMUS. It is a dangerous game
To play with Emperors.

CASSIUS. Old friend, old friend,
Still that rough tongue of yours! Were we not comrades
Before our beards were grown? and now we see

These fine young sparks around that call us father,
Shall we forget our youth? I'm Cassius.
Remember not my titles. Brothers-in-arms,
Before this month is out we shall be busy,
So get your wits to work. By Hercules!
Valerius, and Maximus, and you,
Runs not the blood more eager in your veins
At thought of action?

MAXIMUS. Though the end be death
I'll not regret it much; for the beginning
Shows me once more a Roman general.

CASSIUS. Why, Cassius will be tyrannical
If he hears talk of failure.
(*To* MANILIUS) Give me here
The list of all the city's granaries,
And how much corn they yet contain. Ah, good!
There is enough by careful reckoning
To feed us all within the city walls
Until next harvest.

HELIO. Father, may I speak?

CASSIUS. No; let youth listen and experience speak.

MAXIMUS. Let the lad have his say out, for young heads
Do sometimes wag wise tongues.

CASSIUS. What is it, then?

HELIO. Though having this provision for a year,
It seems to me expedient to leave
The city and engage in open war,
Making a junction with my brother's troops
From Alexandria; thus we do reserve
A well-stocked city to retire on
If we experience a check.

VALERIUS. Why, yes!
I think that he speaks sense.

MAXIMUS. What do we gain
From leaving the protection of our walls,
Which never can be carried by assault,
Save by a greater force than Marcus has?
Nor can they starve us, but themselves the first
Must feel the nip of hunger, till, perhaps,
Impatient, famine-worn, his very troops
Will clamour at our gates to be our friends.

DRU. There's much in favour of his argument.

CASSIUS. Maximus, you are wrong. This sitting still
Will sap the loyalty of our troops, not theirs,
And will give leisure to seditious cliques
To work their way in Antioch.

MAXIMUS. Maybe;
But chattering around the market stalls,
Mutterings, treasonable whisperings,
There must be with a ruler who annexed
With his own hand imperial sovereignty.

CASSIUS. Ha! Maximus! I say that you are wrong,
And the advantage to Aurelius
In inactivity.

MAXIMUS. Oh, bend your wits
Upon this subject, Cassius, I pray,
As fits a soldier! When we talk of war
We talk of tactics, not of your desires
To have the battle won, and in your tent
The spoils already.

CASSIUS. By the Holy Twins!
Shall I not make my plans to please myself,
Who am the Emperor?

MAXIMUS (*rising*). Augustus, do!
And I, your servant, will receive your orders.

CASSIUS. Be seated, Maximus.

MAXIMUS. My lord, I stand.

CASSIUS. Be seated, friend.

MAXIMUS. I wait your orders, lord.

CASSIUS. Will not this fellow put us out of patience?
Come, Maximus; you think it wiser, then,
To let time work for us, ere we advance
Our troops to the attack?

MAXIMUS. I think so—yes.

CASSIUS. And this though we are twice as numerous
As the enemy can be?

MAXIMUS. You risk too much
Upon one move; should you receive a check,
The fortune of the board too goes
Against you, and your check becomes a mate.

CASSIUS. We'll give our thought to it. If we decide
To wait a siege, we must divide the city
Into a little group of provinces,
Making responsible a Syrian
For each, and keep our finger in this way
Upon rebellion.

Enter a SLAVE.

SLAVE. Lord, a letter.

CASSIUS. Take it;
Read it for us, Manilius.

MANILIUS (*reading*). O gods!
Alas! let your own eyes read what the stars
Have writ adversely.

CASSIUS. What is this?

MANILIUS. Your son——

CASSIUS. Read it, Manilius; no dishonest thing
Can stand among the letters of his name.
What of him, then?

MANILIUS. My lord, he has been killed——

HELIO. Immortal gods! my brother, for what cause?

MANILIUS. This letter, lord, is in your daughter's hand,
Though written with such haste I scarce can read;
Yet it appears the currish populace
Did him to death upon the public streets
With clubs and stones. They have cast off your rule,
Crying "No Cassius! No Cassius!"
Broken your statues, and reversed your laws,
And closed the gates of Alexandria
Until Aurelius come.

HELIO. Ah, Maximus!
Is this a time to sit and wait for blows?

CASSIUS. Give me that letter! Eldest-born, best-loved,
Thus have they served you? Nay, assuredly

There is some power behind the visible world
Remembering our evil actions. Once
I broke faith and betrayed Seleucia,
Sacked and destroyed it; then there came a plague
That smote my army underneath my eyes,
Until my dying soldiers cursed my sin,
That brought it on them. Now I have usurped
Unlawful power, and my eldest son,
Reversing all wise Nature's kind provisions,
Precedes me to my grave. Unbolt the gates,
Unbolt the gates, and let Aurelius
End well what ill began!

MAXIMUS. My lord!

CASSIUS. Go! go!
What further evils are prepared for us
We will not live to see. *(Going.)*

MAXIMUS. Stay, Cassius!
Where is your manly courage?

CASSIUS. Let me go;
Grief has it in its keeping.

MAXIMUS. O great gods!
Is this the man who met the Parthians
And made them taste defeat? Is this the man
Who never feared the issue of a day
Whate'er the odds against him? This the man

Who, when his camp was mutinous, went forth
Naked, except a cloth about his loins,
Like boxers wear, and, standing all alone
Among that weaponed throng, cried, "Kill me, then,
You mutinous rabble! Let the world admire
So good a show of Roman discipline"?

CASSIUS. You have recalled us to ourselves again;
For what is done is done, and to regret
Belongs to slaves and women. Summon here
Our subjects; we'll address them. Maximus,
Come here! The moon being down, you will set out
To-night with the Ferratæ, Scythicæ,
And half the Gallicæ, the horses' hoofs
Being muffled; you will make a wide détour
Behind the army, and will be prepared,
On lighting of a beacon, to attack
Upon their flank; we, simultaneously,
Will pour upon them from the city's gates
And make a juncture.

MAXIMUS. I will be prepared.

CASSIUS. Come here! I'll tell you yet our further plans.

[*Exeunt* CASSIUS *and* MAXIMUS *by door on dais.*

(*The apartment fills with soldiers, citizens, slaves, musicians, and women. A guard is ranged by the throne on the dais.*)

Enter RUFUS, *other* Conspirators, *and the* CENTURION.

CENTURION (*to* RUFUS). Trust in me.

RUFUS. I will because I must.
What will this hour bring forth for all of us?

Re-enter CASSIUS *and* MAXIMUS. CASSIUS *seats himself on the throne.*

CASSIUS. Silence the music!

AN OFFICIAL. Let the music cease!

CASSIUS. My soldiers! Citizens of Antioch!
The news is brought us that the enemy
Lies now without our walls. I summoned you
To solemn conclave ere I sallied forth
To battle with your foes.

A VOICE (*from the back*). Not ours!

MAXIMUS. Who spoke?

CASSIUS. Peace, Maximus! a slavish utterance.
For having neither kindred, country, name,
Slaves have no enemy; but all free men
Find my foes their foes, I being Emperor.
I see a lowering upon your faces,
Sullen and anxious eyes. Put off these looks

Which fear has given you; though I be absent,
I shall have ears, I shall have eyes, and tongues
Present in Antioch, to give me news
Of faithful and unfaithful. Oh, be sure,
When I return victorious (for sure
I shall return, being almost twice the strength
Our rival is; moreover, as you know,
Unconquered yet by force of arms)—returned,
I shall know how to punish or reward.

MAXIMUS. There's mutterings, mutterings, and sullen looks!

CASSIUS. Before I go, if there be any man
Who holds him wronged, let him declare his wrong,
And I will right it.

CENTURION. Hear me, gracious lord!

CASSIUS. What is your grievance?

CENTURION. Foul injustice, lord.

CASSIUS. Name the injustice.

CENTURION. No, I dare not speak;
My enemy is powerful, I poor.
I shall be marked for death by all his servants
Before my tale is finished——

CASSIUS. Would they dare?
Come nearer, fearful one, and tell your story

Freely and frankly. None shall lay a hand
Upon you in our presence. Nearer, then!

(*The* CENTURION *advances as far as the steps of the dais, and stands at the foot of them.*)

CENTURION. My lord, I had a brother, a true man,
A soldier, a free Roman, valiant,
Obedient and able, well-considered
Among his fellows and officers.
He has been put to death without a trial,
Without a cause being shown, complaint being made,
But wickedly, unlawfully, unjustly,
Affronting all the standing of our laws
And your authority.

CASSIUS. An evil deed!
Who did it?

CENTURION. Lord, I dare not tell his name;
He stands so close to you, in such repute——

CASSIUS. Whoe'er it is, although it were my son,
It were an evil deed. His name!

CENTURION. I cannot.
Better to suffer what's already done
Than bring fresh evil on my clamouring.

CASSIUS. His name, I say! I will not have my laws
So lightly set aside.

CENTURION (*making as if to retreat*). No, let me go!
I was a fool to let my angry grief
Outrun my prudence. Pardon; let me go!

CASSIUS (*rising, and advancing to edge of dais by steps*). You
shall not. I must know the rights of it.
Come here!

MAXIMUS. I fear a trick. Stay where you are!

CASSIUS (*shakes him off*). Are you grown timid too? Are
they all mice,
My Roman army! (*Goes down the steps.*)
Come, you quaking knees,
Speak like a man! Who wronged your brother?

CENTURION (*stabbing up at him on the last step*). You!
And I avenge him!

CASSIUS. Then the score is paid.
Is death so evil?
(*He falls dead at foot of steps.*)

MAXIMUS. Cassius falls! he falls!
Seize the Centurion!

HELIO. Kill him——

RUFUS. Save his life!
He's freed us of a tyrant.

HELIO. On, the guard!

(*A certain faction have ranged round the* CENTURION; *the guard prepare to draw their weapons on the crowd, which sways backwards and forwards alternately.*)

Enter the EMPEROR *at the head of his troops.*

MARCUS. Let no man move a foot on pain of death!

(*A cry goes up, "The Emperor!" The slaves and citizens fall on their knees; voices are heard crying, "Mercy!"*)

MARCUS. Be silent all! Soldiers, lay down the arms
You have disgraced. (*Advances*) Who's here? What!
Cassius?
Who struck this blow?

CENTURION. Augustus, it was I.

MARCUS. I have a grudge against you. Cassius,
I cannot look unmoved upon your face;
You loved me once, and in our earlier days
Were my familiar. Yet do noble souls,
Desiring vain things, from point to point
Descend the scale of vices. Had you lived,
You surely should have been my friend again.
A faithless dagger balks me that revenge;
But as I cover your unseeing eyes

With your dead lids, I cover, Cassius,
Your sins from all men's sight for ever.
(*He closes* CASSIUS' *eyes.*)
Disperse this people! Let them all go home,
And get about their proper industries.
I will not have them loitering in the streets,
To breed a tangible evil on the shades
Of discontent. Go, one of you, and seal
All Cassius' letters and his properties,
And have them brought to me. As for these men,
Let them be guarded until we decide
Upon their fate.

RUFUS. My lord——!

MARCUS. I see you, Rufus;
Your tongue should not be glib to call my eyes
Upon you. Take him out! Ah, Maximus!

MAXIMUS. I was his friend. You shall do what you please
On my poor carcass.

MARCUS (*sternly*). Be you sure I will.
Take Cassius up upon your knitted shields.
Carry him out. Ah, poor ambitious soul,
Your obsequies shall be imperial!

END OF ACT III.

ACT IV.

Scene I.—Faustina's *tent outside the walls of Antioch.*

Faustina, Petronilla.

Faustina. To-night you must slip out of camp, my girl;
I will contrive the Emperor gives the pass
At supper. Then all's well, there is no danger;
Only I dare not send a letter now,
But give our Cassius news by word of mouth.
Can you remember what you have rehearsed
About the disposition of these troops,
And what I know of plans?

Petr. I think so, lady.

Faustina. See that you do. Tell Cassius I burn
Until he comes; he must not much delay,
Lest evil happen; it's a dangerous game,
Played from my husband's tent.

Petr. Trust me to speak.

Faustina. And if he should inquire of my looks,
Tell him that I am pale—yet must he not

Conceive my beauty changed. Tell him I walk
All night about my tent, and sigh his name.

PETR. Leave it to me. Is this the first occasion
I've carried messages? By Venus, now,
Do you remember what a fright we had
When Lycophron, with his great shoulders, crouched
Behind the curtains?

FAUSTINA. Will you laugh so loudly?
These walls are thin, and your tongue indiscreet;
Moreover, all these things are past. You know
That I refused this Cassius at Rome
—Although he is a personable man—
And made him wait occasion.

PETR. So you did.
I always thought you did not love him much.

FAUSTINA. Love! What is love? It is an itch of the flesh
For the unlike, the new. Love Cassius?
I love him well enough to use his arm
To prop for me that edifice of power
Which else had toppled at my husband's death—
And yet he's handsome, mark you.

PETR. Handsome? Yes,
For those who like mature men. As for me,
I hate grey hairs.

FAUSTINA. Then I will marry you
To one of his young soldiers. There's in him
A stirring and uneasiness of soul,
Fierce and spasmodic efforts of the mind,
As one may see a wrestler's muscles crisp,
To stir his adversary. I have won,
But shall I keep? He wears my servitude
Somewhat ungraciously.

PETR. How strange are men,
Who make of women light and empty things,
And yet are bound to them!

FAUSTINA. All things are strange,
And men and women most. We do not love
The souls that most exalt us, or, by Venus!
I'd love my lord, which (Venus knows) I do not.
And yet I might have loved him on that day
There came the news of Cassius' revolt,
And the fool messenger, who needs must blab,
"Cassius asked me for the Empress' news,"
To make a man run mad with jealousy.
But Marcus, with his grave look, waved away
Such imputations. He will hear no ill,
Nor think no ill. I might have loved him then
But that he lacks in something: Ah, dear gods!
I know not. I am sad to-day.

PETR. With what?

FAUSTINA. The burden of my nature—nothing more.

PETR. Are you not well?

FAUSTINA. If I be well in health,
When all things are as stale with use and wont
As oft-repeated lovers' vows become.

PETR. Would we were back in Rome, where you might find
Diversion in the shows!

FAUSTINA. To see men act
I might forget my inactivity.
How sweet the perfume of this rose I smell!—
So, and so, and once again I breathe it—
And now its sweet no more; the sense is cloyed
With repetition. (*Drops it.*)

PETR. (*picks it up*). Yet it is still sweet.

FAUSTINA. What matter? If the scent for me is staled,
For me it's non-existent. Throw it down!
What lassitude do the immortal gods,
If gods there be, suffer unendingly,
Suffering their existence!

MARCUS (*without*). Within there!

FAUSTINA. My lord!

MARCUS (*entering*). Are you alone?

FAUSTINA. With my own thoughts.

MARCUS. Is that to be alone?

FAUSTINA. Or companied
Only by manes.

MARCUS. We will share the shades,
And make it company. I've news for you.

FAUSTINA. All news is good that brings with it a change
In things existent.

MARCUS. Cassius is dead!

FAUSTINA (*starts up*). Ha! Gods! Impossible! It is not so!

MARCUS. Why should I say it otherwise?

FAUSTINA (*wildly*). Why? Why?
I thought you meant to trap—You say he's dead?

MARCUS. I said so.

FAUSTINA (*recovering*). Tell me of his death, I pray.
My ears can scarcely credit this great news.
Give me the details.

MARCUS. A centurion,
Revengeful for some deed of Cassius,

Struck him his death-blow. I came on the heels
Of his departing spirit.

FAUSTINA. By so little——!

MARCUS. Little or much are even in the scale
Of Time's immensity. Yet I regret
That by that little I lost Cassius.

FAUSTINA. He's dead! he's dead! Death oft strips off the mask
We choose to wear, and shows our Nature's mould
Deformed and ugly. How looked Cassius?

MARCUS. Not uncontented, calmer than in life.

FAUSTINA. So should death come to us, elect of earth,
Spare us the churlish tricks it sometimes plays
On poor humanity, the puckered brow,
The dropped lip I have seen, the line that mocks
The handiwork of Nature. Cassius dead!

MARCUS. And once affairs are ordered in the East
We will return to Rome. With Cassius' death
Rebellion ceases. Antioch is calmed,
And I have here in guard his generals,
And all suspected of conspiracy;
His letters, too, are in my hands——

FAUSTINA. O gods!

MARCUS. Which may reveal how deep this evil is,
And how far-reaching.

FAUSTINA. Ah!

MARCUS. It pleases you
That we return to Rome?

FAUSTINA. Nay, where you are
Your wife must needs be. Come now, and sit down,
And let me share your ease, as I have shared
Your manifold anxieties. That's well!
So, you have all these papers?

MARCUS. Under seal.

FAUSTINA. Here in the camp?

MARCUS. They are in Antioch,
As Cassius left them; they'll be brought to me.

FAUSTINA. Dear husband, rest yourself to-night at least;
So shall the sad task of to-morrow press
Less heavily upon you. (*Calling*) Petronilla!

Enter PETRONILLA.

Burn ambergris before my lord; bruise herbs;
Let music play without.

MARCUS. You'll catch my senses
In such a net of luxury?

FAUSTINA. Alas!
Give me the pleasure of your company,
For I could count the hours I have of you,
Upon one hand.

MARCUS. Dismiss your servants, lady;
I have no need of these aids for my love.
[FAUSTINA *signs; exit* PETRONILLA.

FAUSTINA. Let me, I pray, be pleasant to your eye,
Enrich myself with all things valuable,
That, looking on me, you apprize the sum,
Not my poor value.

MARCUS. Ah, the silver tongue
That cries itself out as unmarketable,
Knowing that by so much the more its worth
Transcends its utterance. Do you think I count
The value of the pearls you wear, your robes,
The state that frames you?

FAUSTINA. I'm a woman, lord,
Jewels and gauds my playthings; give me leave
With this my weakness.

MARCUS. What is it you want?

FAUSTINA. I have heard rumours that the treasure-rooms
In Cassius' Palace are more wonderful

Than even Rome can show. There are the spoils
Of immemorial antiquity,
Taken from conquered cities and old tombs;
For there are heaped all treasures of the world
Since world began, the flotsam glorious
Flung by the tides of time.

MARCUS. That gives you pleasure?
For me such things do shriek mortality.

FAUSTINA. Will you not let me go to Antioch
And choose among these treasures?

MARCUS. As you will;
Take what you want of trinkets, but, remember,
I need the gold and silver for my use,
To give my soldiers what they have well earned;
And I'll reserve a portion of his goods
For Cassius' heirs.

FAUSTINA. What! will you so reward,
The sons of traitors?

MARCUS. Shall I be a tyrant,
Confounding innocence with guiltiness?

FAUSTINA. Are they not traitors too who make their part
With traitors?

MARCUS. That's to judge. There may be some
Who simply were misled; yet this revolt

Seems to me widely spread, and to embrace
The highest in the land.

FAUSTINA. Ha! Do you know
The names of the unfaithful?

MARCUS. Only those
We've seized in Antioch, but it is sure
That Cassius' correspondence will yield up
The names of all the others.

FAUSTINA. Be it so!
Let ignominy blot them out from life
And our remembrance. Talk no more of them.
Nay, nay! recall the promise you have made,
And let me to those treasures.

MARCUS. In the morning.

FAUSTINA. No, no! You will forget your order then.
Here are your tablets; will you write it now?
(*She puts his tablets in his hand.*)

MARCUS. I pray you let me rest. It is not often
I give by body audience; to-night
It clamours to be heard. Pray let me rest;
I am most weary.

FAUSTINA. Oh, my dearest lord,
It is a moment's work!

MARCUS. My stile, then.
You're right; why should I shirk a moment's work?
(*He is about to write*, FAUSTINA *bending towards him; he pauses and looks.*)
Yet what is this? You have a feverish eye.
Why do you hasten such a simple task?
Put down my tablets.

FAUSTINA. Will you cross me so?

MARCUS. Are you a child, to be thus shamelessly
Greedy for playthings?

FAUSTINA. Write it, out of love.

MARCUS. You are too eager.

FAUSTINA. It's my woman's whim.

MARCUS. You bend upon it all the energy
Of your quick will. Can such a little thing
Call into play such powers?

FAUSTINA. If I should say——
I'd written letters unto Cassius
That I was anxious for, would urgency
Appear more natural?

MARCUS. A dangerous jest!

FAUSTINA. Why, so it is! The danger makes the jest.
It is not possible.

MARCUS. Not possible.
Even the brute creation does not bite
The breast that suckles it; you'll make me men
Less reasoning than beasts!

FAUSTINA (*rising*). You will not write it?

MARCUS. Why, as you will (*about to write*).

Enter a SLAVE.

SLAVE. My lord, there waits without——

FAUSTINA. Out of our presence, slave!

SLAVE. Oh, pardon me!

FAUSTINA. Out of our presence!

MARCUS. Stay! What do you want?

SLAVE. Your secretary, lord, would speak with you.

MARCUS. Let him come in. Faustina, you'll allow
It may be something needful . . . . Call him here.

Enter VECTILIANUS.

VECT. My lord, we have collected under seal
All Cassius' correspondence; I have watched
To see it was untouched, and brought it here,
Fearing to leave it elsewhere.

MARCUS. It is well.
I'll come directly, take it to my tent.

FAUSTINA. Fie! Fie! Recall your promise to your mind
To sup with me to-night.

MARCUS. To-night excuse me;
These matters must be seen to.

FAUSTINA. No, I say.
To-morrow will be better, you will come
Clear-headed to perusal; but to-night
I know that you are weary—why, yourself
Complained of it——

MARCUS. I cannot——

FAUSTINA. If you fear
The safety of these papers, let them be
Here in my tent, and underneath your eye.
Vectilianus, put them here.

MARCUS. Not so.
I cannot stay to-night.

FAUSTINA. O gods, you shall!
Alas! can I not move you by my prayers?
You slight me; you'll deprive me of yourself,
Although I bear the hardships of campaign,
Leaving the luxury and ease of Rome

To be with you. It is a little thing
That I require; yet by that you show
Whether you love me, and you honour me.

MARCUS. That I do love you I have given proofs
Greater than ordinary. Are you a girl,
Are you a courtesan, to make the test
Of love lie in a trifle? Oh, for shame!
You'll put so high a value on a thing
That's worthless, just to turn me from the course
That is my duty, as, on idle days,
Playing, you'll turn a goldfish with a straw!

FAUSTINA. Be angry if you will, so you but stay
To be in anger.

MARCUS (*going*). Neither going nor staying
Will I be angry.

FAUSTINA. Stay!

MARCUS. I'll come to-morrow
When you are royal once more.

FAUSTINA. By all the gods!
Stay now, or lack me ever! Oh, dear heart!
Why are my words so wild? I am not well;
I think that I am sick.

MARCUS. Your hand is dry;
I'll lead you to your couch. Where are your slaves?

FAUSTINA. Leave them! leave them! Do you stay with me.
In all the years that I have been your wife
I've not importuned you; but now I swear
I'll break my heart if you deny me this.
You'll stay?

MARCUS. Were I myself I'd stay with you
Though earthquakes raged—need I protest my love?—
But being Emperor, I have in care
The fortunes of the world, that comes the first;
For it is necessary I inquire
Into these papers, mark what plans are made,
And so prevent catastrophe. Good-bye!
I'll call your slaves.
(*Summons* PETRONILLA.)
Shall I return to-night?

FAUSTINA. You shall not—no!

MARCUS. To-morrow morning, then.
Be careful of your health. Good-bye!
[*Exit* MARCUS AURELIUS *with* VECTILIANUS.

FAUSTINA. O gods!
May all your curses light upon that wretch
Who balked my purpose! That by such a thing
I should be lost! May he be withered up
One side of his vile body, that he goes

Mumblingly, haltingly, a thing to mock!
May he want food to eat and teeth to bite!
May he want rags to cover up his sores!
How must he burst inopportunely in
To wreck my safety! Leave the Emperor here,
And I'd have had my letters by some means,
And all been well. There's malice in this fate.
Oh, may he rot, being still alive, and fall
A prey to vermin! May he, ere he's dead,
Taste all death's horrors! Oh, the gods of hell!
I am betrayed and ruined.

(*She falls on the couch.*)

PETR. Oh, take comfort,
Lady; look up! Alas! what evil chance
Has fallen upon us? Lady, lift your head;
Go to the Emperor, fall upon your knees;
He will forgive you.

FAUSTINA (*rising*). Summon here my slaves!
Bring hither Tyrian purple and fine robes
Of linen, bordered with the azure dye
That mocks the Bay of Baiæ's summer hue;
Robe me as I was never robed before;
Put pearl-stitched golden sandals on my feet;
Perfume my hair; rub unguents on my limbs
Until my body shines like Artemis

On starless summer nights; bring hither gold
To bind my hair with, fashion of my locks
A net to capture Cupid; let loose curls
Escape upon my neck with cunning art,
Promising wantonness. Come, touch my eyes
With kohl-stick, that love's shadows lie upon
My languorous glances; where my upper lip
Droops to the under one put rose-leaf red;
Rub henna on my fingers; smear my arms
With almond-juice; let perfumes drop from me
As honey from a comb.

(*She waves away the slaves who have adorned her. They exeunt.*)

PETR. Oh, royal, most royal,
Like her of Paphos! none that sees you so
But must become your lover. Let us go
Triumphantly before the Emperor.

FAUSTINA. Royally to my last lover will I go,
The lover to which all fair women come—
To Death himself.

PETR. Ah, it's a fearful jest!

FAUSTINA. Why are you pale. Is death so ill, poor fool?

PETR. Alas, my lady!

FAUSTINA. Now, upon my couch
Spread Persian rugs and pillows of soft down,

Strew rose-leaves for my limbs, and by my head
Let violets breathe their fragrance.

PETR. (*weeping*). Nay, my mistress——!

FAUSTINA. Shall I not die as I desire—I,
Who for desire have lived?

PETR. Oh, do not die!

FAUSTINA. Shall I, who have been Empress of the world,
Live to be less, drag out my failing years
In some confined and barren island nook,
Hid from, forgotten by the world of men,
But slaves and peasants, who, to see me pass,
Drop tools, and stare sheep-eyed, with open mouths?
What want I more of life? All gifts of earth
I have enjoyed; my beauty goes from me,
And I have lost the stake I played for power;
And all my lovers' faces are as dust
Beneath the grinding wheels of the slow years,
Together they're confounded, scarce is one
That I remember; many I saw die,
And on the yellow sands of the arena
The patches of their blood. I am fed full
Of life's feast, and will get me from the banquet
Into the dark without.
Bring me that casket; fill this jewelled cup

With honey-coloured wine, where I dissolve
This tablet.

PETR. Lady! lady! do not drink!

FAUSTINA. My body is long wearied out with love,
Nothing has ever satisfied my soul;
Let death end all.
(*She drinks.*)
Come, help me to my couch;
Strew roses over me; let flutes without
Play me to sleep.
(*She is helped to her couch; a sound of flutes begins outside.*)

FAUSTINA. Enough! enough! Too sweet that music is;
Already it comes broken to my ears
With its voluptuous sounds of life and love:
Already Lethe washes to my knees.
Oh, bitter, fruitless life we hold so dear!
I would I were the sun, that with my life
All life should perish; no more sultry noons,
When the blood beats with languorous desire
Against the rose-crowned temples. I'd destroy
All beauty with me, choke the nightingales,
Put out the torch of love, sow salt upon
The fertile places of the blossoming earth!
Support me, Petronilla! My sight fails—
I fall—I fall! O gods, I would destroy,

Burn, ravage, wreck the world! Oh, empty days,
And monstrous disillusion of all life;
I am the hungry panther of this world,
Roving for love, with love unsatisfied!
There's blood—there's blood upon the thirsty sands,
And on my chariot wheels, and on my robes—
There's blood, there's darkness!

(*She dies.*)

SCENE 2.—*The* EMPEROR'S *tent in the camp outside Antioch.*

MARCUS AURELIUS, JULIAN, VECTILIANUS.

MARCUS (*at a table with papers*). So we have sifted out this mass at last,
And read the purport of his government:
His plans for ships and harbours, the account
Of tribute, and the manner he controlled
The corn-supply; there's much shows wisdom here,
In Cassius' provisions. What is that?

JULIAN. The packet of his letters to his friends——

VECTILIANUS. And to your enemies.

JULIAN. Shall I open it?

MARCUS. Give it to me. I think with Cassius' death
These plans that we have seen must crumple up,
And none be left to fear. Vectilianus,
Dispatch these letters to my governors,
My prefects and proconsuls.

VECT. Ay, my lord.

MARCUS. Give me the names of all the prisoners
We took in Antioch.

JULIAN. Here is the list.

MARCUS (*reading*). I find too many. Bring these in to me.

VECT. They wait outside.

MARCUS. Then let them enter now.
(VECTILIANUS *goes to tent door.*)

Enter RUFUS, TITUS, HORATIUS, *and many other Roman* Conspirators, *bound and guarded.*

MARCUS. Rufus, come here!

RUFUS (*advancing*). Augustus!

MARCUS. Cut his bonds!
Now that your hands are freed, free too your tongue;
Tell me what grievances you had, so great
They cracked your loyalty.

JULIAN. Will you not speak
When you're commanded?

RUFUS. Lord!

MARCUS. I say, what wrongs
Had I committed upon you and yours,
That you should plan my death?

RUFUS. Imperial!

MARCUS. Had any of your kinsman claimed the law,
And met injustice; had I stopped my ears
Against your clamours, spurned you from my seat;
Had I cast lustful eyes upon your wife,
Given your daughters to my servants' sport
—These deeds are not unknown with Emperors—
Nay, had I even in your private purse
Thrust my compelling hand, I might have blamed,
But I had understood. Did I such things?

RUFUS. Your dealings have been just throughout your reign.

MARCUS. Or there are lesser things that might have caused
Your hate; for passions are like those great rocks
Pivoted on a point. Had I but made
A passing witticism on your name,
It were enough for you to wish me ill;
Had I affected not to see your hand
When you saluted me, or turned my back
When you addressed me. You were honest once;
Tell me what causes drew you to the camp
Of Cassius?

RUFUS. All's tangled and obscure,
And no excuses now show fair enough
To dress our action—yet there is excuse.
We never thought to set up Cassius
Your rival——

MARCUS. Yet I find you in his court,
Supporting with your presence that his state,
Which was my rival. Pray you to speak truth.

RUFUS. Wrongfully were we there, and wrongfully
Our actions so were coloured, that I see.
We were the prisoners of Cassius,
Who was our comrade formerly. In Rome
He had agreed to help our enterprise,
To banish form and name of Emperor,
For ever from our state; being powerful,
He used the power we had helped him to
To be our master.

MARCUS. Is this true?

TITUS. Indeed.

HORATIUS. Augustus, we repent it.

MARCUS. I perceive
King Log is like to be more popular,
After King Stork.

HORATIUS. It is so, mighty one!

MARCUS. King Log has been too loggish all these years:
Put off the childish terrors that surround
The shedder of unnecessary blood;
Desired good among the folk he ruled,
More than his own; considered every life
More valuable than that which burdened him;
And all the frogs cry: "What a King is this,
Who cannot in his progress through his towns
Leave slaughtered bodies as his testament."
Well, well! Give me my tablets, Julian!

(*He writes.*)

See that these men are straightway sent to Rome,
Taking this with them.

TITUS. Sentence of our death!

MARCUS. Rufus, I give this letter to your charge.
See you deliver it.

RUFUS. I will, my lord.

MARCUS. I send you to the Senate, you yourself
Desiring their ruling.

RUFUS. It is just.
I will most faithfully deliver this.

MARCUS. You know its message?

RUFUS. Yes; it is the death
That we have earned.

MARCUS. Then read it and be sure.

RUFUS. I read you recommend the Senate here
To treat us with the greatest leniency,
Lighten our punishment, and on our goods
Spare confiscating hands. I know you jest,
And yet it is not like Aurelius.

MARCUS. Myself had pardoned you, but it is just
The Senate judge you; they will punish you
With long or shorter terms of banishment.
Go! and be faithful Romans, all of you.

RUFUS (*kneeling*). What tortures had not made me do, I do
Before your mercy.

MARCUS. Get you gone! Good-bye!

RUFUS (*going with other* Conspirators *or* Soldiers). May
never any evil wish or deed
Come near you any more!

[*Exit.*

MARCUS. Although it do,
It shall not touch my soul.

JULIAN. My lord, my lord,
This clemency of yours will breed contempt
Of him who wields it! Where a hundred deaths
Had made example of conspiracy,

A hundred such conspiracies will spring
From one life spared.

MARCUS. Where'er the need is plain
To benefit the Empire, I am stern;
But once I will do pleasure to myself
In doing hurt to none. I'll not revenge
The sins of Cassius upon his sons.
The populace of Alexandria
Has murdered one; we'll let the others go,
Taking their families and property,
Into some place of exile we will name.
I cannot leave them near their father's seat,
Lest popularity should find a peg
To hang its tatters on.

Enter VECTILIANUS.

VECT. There wait without
The foremost citizens of Antioch,
Praying to see you.

MARCUS. Let them be brought in.

Enter Citizens *of Antioch in humble attire, with every mark of humility. They prostrate themselves.*

MARCUS. This is a servile people, I can see,
With necks born crooked to the yoke. Stand up,
You men of Antioch! Why are you come?

1ST CITIZEN. To ask your mercy, godlike and august,
For our unhappy city. Spare your wrath,
Or turn it to the quarter whence the ill
Most surely emanated. Not on us
Visit your punishment, O mighty one,
Who are as innocent of treachery
As are the unborn babes within our walls.
Cassius compelled us, with such tyranny
As memory must flinch from.

MARCUS. It is clear
A slavish habit makes a lying tongue.

1ST CITIZEN. I testify by the immortal gods
That we were faithful to you, but that man
Bore on us such a cruel and iron hand,
Sowing his spies among us, ruling us
At the sword's point, oppressing us with arms.

MARCUS. You'll not placate the living, of the dead
Speaking these slanders.

1ST CITIZEN. Master, it is true;
We were his tools, no more, as innocent
Of good and bad intent that we were put to
As the inanimate handiworks of man.

MARCUS. Strange, strange it is, so small a thing as death
Can make such rage and tempest in the soul,

That from the deepest bottom it brings up
Clear sand or mud, and shows that property
Hidden before. For you, stand on your feet;
These bowed backs shall not move me, nor these titles.
I know that Antioch for many years
Has harboured treason; lacking your support,
Cassius never had proclaimed himself,
And when he did so, you made holiday,
Shouted, and clapped your hands, drank health to him,
Hung garlands on your doorposts. Will you still
Deny these things to me?

1ST CITIZEN. O powerful!
If certain did these things, the scum of streets,
Beggars and thieves and slaves, who know no rule
Except the passing hour, will you condemn
The sober and the honest stay-at-homes,
Who, for they're not apparent, lack the eye
The noisy rabble wins.

JULIAN. This fellow pleads
Like one who'll bolster up a shaky case
With pathos.

1ST CITIZEN. Hear me, hear me! Will you give
This fair and stately city to the flames,
Filling her prosperous streets with slaughtered dead,

Mingling young blood with fountains, that were planned
For joy and comfort?

MARCUS. It is men themselves
That set their harms in motion, and are ground
Between the teeth of their own folly.

1ST CITIZEN. Gods!
We cannot move him!

2ND CITIZEN. Lord, you see us here,
The wealthiest, best-reputed men who live
In Antioch. We pray your clemency
To take our lives in fee for Antioch.

MARCUS. I take them, and I give them you again.
Get up from off your knees; go to your homes;
Yet see that you walk humbly: this poor dress
Becomes you better than your festive robes.
This is the punishment that I impose
On Antioch, ungrateful Antioch,
Disloyal and perverted: that no shows,
No races, contests, hunting of wild beasts,
Be given in her walls for seven years,
That so long may her fickle mind retain
The memory of wrong. That is my will.

1ST CITIZEN. Divine beneficence——

MARCUS. Spare me your words;
Let deeds prove whether you are grateful. Go!
[*Exeunt* Citizens.

JULIAN. I think I shall search through the lives of princes,
To parallel your generosity.

MARCUS. I do not doubt that in a month or two
They would forgive a general massacre,
Rather than this depriving them for years
Of public shows. Bring Maximus to me.

Enter MAXIMUS, *bound and guarded*.

MAXIMUS. Tell me my fate.

MARCUS. Am I a Chaldean,
That I should know it?

MAXIMUS. Shall I laugh with you?
I still can laugh, Aurelius.

MARCUS. I am glad.
It is too long a time since I have laughed.

MAXIMUS. Then I'll not envy you, who live and laugh not,
While I can laugh the day that I must die.

MARCUS. You laugh with teeth on edge, though, Maximus.
Come over here! If I should cut your bonds,
What would you do?

MAXIMUS. If you were such a fool,
I'd seize a dagger and avenge my friend,
And my own future fate.

MARCUS. Give me your dagger—
Give it me, Julian; I have a wish
To show less wisdom than the name I bear,
And test my folly. So!

(*He cuts* MAXIMUS' *bonds.*)

JULIAN. Come closer, guards!

MAXIMUS. Why do you free my hands?

MARCUS. I will not see
A Roman, once an honoured general,
Bound with these slavish and ignoble cords.

MAXIMUS. You do not fear my threat, Aurelius?

MARCUS. So little, that I offer you the hilt.

MAXIMUS (*seizes the dagger and throws it down*). O gods! I loved this Cassius as myself,
More dearly than my kinsmen; we had been
Brothers-in-arms for nearly thirty years,
Nor ever had I grudged his genius
The eyes it drew to him, my lesser virtues
Being hidden in his shade. I was more glad
To hear him praised than if it were myself.

I had not stopped to make him Emperor,
He being by all his qualities marked out
To bear the purple better than yourself—
Better than you, I say; I would have planned
Your death to give it him, with my own hands
Have thrust the dagger in between your ribs.

JULIAN. O gods! My lord, let torture make retract
The tongue that speaks this!

MAXIMUS. Will you make me fear?
I say that I loved Cassius, that's enough
To show me where my death is; you but gloss
Known facts.

MARCUS. Yet, Maximus, I loved him too;
Therefore with you I must deserve my death.

MAXIMUS. It pleases you to stand and jape with me,
Aping a kindliness you cannot have,
That, thereby catching me in softened mood,
You may discover weakness in my looks
Before your executioners.

MARCUS. Not so.
Like a physician, I search patiently
For motives that may make good men revolt
Against a rule that strives to govern them
With wisdom, justice, temperance—no more.

MAXIMUS. Of motives I know nothing. Will it please you
To name the time and manner of my death?

MARCUS. As it may please the immortal gods to cause.
I do not want your life.

MAXIMUS. I'll speak no more;
I will not be so fooled and jested with;
You shall not force another sound from me
Till death seals up my mouth.

MARCUS. Go, Maximus!
We'll not require lip-love of you, then;
But serve us well in Britain.
(MAXIMUS *starts, but remains silent.*)
Do you stay?
We see your reason: you are dusty, torn,
Not dressed as fits a Roman general.
Give him our cloak.
(JULIAN *gives it;* MAXIMUS *passive and preserving a stiff silence.*)
Go, Maximus! Good-night!
It's very late, and our night's work undone.
[*Exit* MAXIMUS, *as if expecting the soldiers at the tent door to seize him.*
Come, set the lamp here, Julian; my eyes
Are not so good for reading as they were.

Re-enter MAXIMUS.

MAXIMUS. Before high heaven and the immortal gods
I'll serve you faithfully!

MARCUS. Do so! Good-bye!
[MAXIMUS *salutes and exit.*

MARCUS. Give me those papers. When I break the seal,
I let out all the venom of man's mind,
All hatred and maliciousness, that weigh
Upon our mortal flesh. Leave me alone;
I'll call when I require anyone.
[*Exit* JULIAN *and* Soldiers. MARCUS AURELIUS *alone.*
O gods! O gods! Fie on this grumbling soul,
That wearies of its task ere Nature will
The task be ended! Here, beneath my hand,
Are laid the hidden hearts of many men.
What shall I read therein? Ingratitude,
Lies, envy, spite, the barbed and venomous word
Of those that called me Emperor, I called friend;
Who, for the small ambition to play big
Upon this shifting scene, have done such wrong
To their own reason and their rectitude.
Yet, if they wrong themselves, it hurts not me,
Who am not wronged by them while my own soul
Remains unaltered. Break the seal, and read

Which of our subjects, of our intimates,
Our friends of many years, are netted here.
How thickly fall the shadows in the tent!
Almost I fancied, with my tired eyes,
I saw Faustina there . . . Faustina, you!
What said the messenger that brought me word
Of Cassius' wild speeches? What nods one?
What winks another with discerning look?
What did she say herself? If I should find
Her name among the friends of Cassius?
Ah no, Faustina, not such perfidy!
The gods must blush at it! Am I grown grey
And learnt no wisdom? Though it should be so—
Though yet it cannot be—what's that to me?
Am *I* wronged by it? Yet it cannot be,
With that frank brow. I've loved you faithfully;
It could not be so. Open then, and read.
(*He breaks the seal; then puts down the papers.*)
To what end, to what end should I repeat
The oft-repeated tale of wickedness,
Wearying the laboured syllables
With the burden of sins? For what is done, is done;
Let it be out of mind. I will not know
More than I must of unprofitable things,
Lest they should, in the garden of my soul,
Nourish rank weeds of hate and bitterness;

I will not hate that which I cannot change.

(*He drops the papers into a tripod.*)

Burn! Go into oblivion! The gods
Permit themselves to pity good and bad,
Giving to each the sunshine and sweet rain,
And hiding all things in the mist of years.
May I not do as gods do? Burn away,
Consume all hate and evil into smoke!
I will not know of them; assuredly
For me such ills exist not——

(*A muffled sound of wailing is heard outside.*)

Who's without?

(*He lifts the flap of tent. Enter a procession with* FAUSTINA *on a rich bier.*)

THE END.

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